

ARCHAEOLOGY IN OXFORD

*Oxford City Report to the Oxford City and County Archaeological Forum
June-September 2019*

NPPF related field work in Oxford

New College School, Savile Road

Between May and September phases of archaeological recording have been undertaken at the site of New College School on Savile Road prior to the construction of a major new development for New College comprising undergraduate accommodation and teaching space, now named the Gradel Quadrangles (<https://www.new.ox.ac.uk/gradel-quadrangles>). The first phase of works in May involved a watching brief by Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) during the excavation of small geotechnical pits dug to examine the nature of the foundations of the former school building. Subsequently in September two trenches were excavated by MOLA to further understand the character of the Royalist Civil War rampart here and the potentially earlier loam bank below. The loam is being excavated in grids and sieved to ensure that any redeposited prehistoric flint or pottery is carefully recorded. At the time of writing the loam bank has produced only isolated flints and Roman pottery leaving open the question of when it was created. The results of this work will inform the approach to further excavations at this site.

Headington School

Between June and August a phased excavation was undertaken at Headington School by Foundations Archaeology prior to the construction of a new teaching block. The excavation revealed a series of large ditches and pits associated with Roman domestic settlement on the top of Headington Hill. The report is forthcoming.

Right: Roman ditches and pits marked out with blue spray paint at Headington School.

Land at Hill Top Road

Between June and August a geophysical survey and evaluation was undertaken at Hill Top Road near to Warneford Meadow by Sumo Geophysics and Albion Archaeology. The geophysical survey suggested the presence of Roman kilns at this site however subsequent trenching revealed the anomalies to be modern features.



The White Hart, Lower Wolvercote

In June minor works at the White Hart, Wolvercote, were subject to a watching brief by John Moore Heritage Services. Intermittent work is ongoing. The present structure is a two and a half storey building which described in its listing as 17th or 18th century in origin. JMHS have noted that there are internal details that are more likely to be of 17th century date.

No 126 High Street

In June historic building recording and a watching brief were undertaken by the Jessop Consultancy during internal alterations No 126 High Street, a Grade I listed building that dates from the 15th century, and has a late 17th century façade. The work uncovered a previously unknown and substantial medieval timber beam along the west side of the ground floor. Along the exposed face of the beam are a row of ten empty

mortices and the remnants of peg holes. There is a chamfer on the lower edge and traces of paint demonstrate that it was once painted white. This may once functioned as a spine beam for a timber floor and may represent part of an earlier floor set at a higher level. The beam has been recorded in detail using photogrammetry to produce a measured survey drawing. The report is forthcoming.

Right: View of the exposed timber beam at No 26 High Street, Photo courtesy of the Jessop Consultancy.

Littlemore Park

Between June and July a geophysical survey and evaluation trenching were undertaken at land near Armstrong Road (Littlemore Park) by Sumo Geophysics and Oxford Archaeology prior to the development of the area for housing. The geophysical survey did not identify any Roman kiln sites which were suspected in this area. However trenching identified Late Iron Age and/or early Roman



settlement activity along with mid and late Roman features. Pits, ditches and post-holes were recorded with finds including two Roman glass beads, cattle and pig bones and pollen evidence for cereals and agricultural weeds. Further recording work is planned.

The Mitre Inn, High Street

Between June and August Oxford Archaeology have been undertaking building recording and targeted excavation work at the Mitre during major refurbishment of the building and the construction of a small extension. The present Mitre building dates from around 1630, but there was an inn on this site since around 1300 and parts of the cellars below are thought to be 13th century in date. The building alterations have exposed some of the post-medieval and Victorian fabric of the building and exposed small areas preserving medieval and later pit deposits. The work is ongoing.

Right: Inspecting the rear exterior of the Mitre Inn, High Street.



Barton Manor

In June evaluation trenching was undertaken by John Moore Heritage Services at land adjacent to Barton Manor prior to the construction of new housing. The evaluation demonstrated that the plot, once occupied by 17th century cottages, had been heavily disturbed by modern groundworks and dumping, however significant features were present including a large medieval ditch, possibly defining the boundary of the settlement. Further work is planned.

Balliol College Masters Field, Holywell

Between July and September Oxford Archaeology undertook targeted excavation and a watching brief at the Balliol College Master's Field development fronting onto St Cross Road in the historic suburb of Holywell. Previous trenching in the northern part of the site had revealed extensive Victorian quarry pits however the excavation revealed parts of the floors, walls and entrance of the medieval and post-medieval tithe barn complex formerly owned by Merton College. One layer of activity contained clay pipe, a musket

ball and a coin of Charles I likely associated with the Civil War. Also from the later Victorian life of the barn spreads of broken glass were found set into the floor which the Polish born site supervisor from Oxford Archaeology recognised as a means of keeping rats away from the stored grain. The report is forthcoming.



Above left: One of the entrances to the old Holywell tithe barn. Above right: Patches of broken glass to deter rats.

The Swan School, Marston

Further to the report of excavations at the Swan School in the last OCCAF summary additional excavation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology in July on a small area of the new playing field. This recorded further Roman settlement evidence in the form of ditches and pits and a single likely cremation in the form of a buried pot with a stone placed inside it, although no cremated bone was recovered.

Right: Possible Roman cremation burial at the Swan School site.



A short video diary about the Swan School dig can be viewed on Twitter and Facebook (you may need to cut and past the link):

<https://twitter.com/OxfordCity/status/1177296782641885184>

<https://www.facebook.com/OxfordCityCouncil/videos/2602848729775425/>



The Mecure Eastgate Hotel, 73 High St

In July a watching brief and targeted excavation was undertaken by John Moore Heritage Services in the car park of the Eastgate Hotel prior to the construction of a balcony and the erection of a new hotel range. The work was required to record medieval and post-medieval remains impacted by new services and to locate the exact position of the medieval city wall bastion so that sympathetic foundations could be designed to support a new balcony structure. The work is ongoing.

Walton Street Repair Works

In August an underground chamber and other voids were identified following a road collapse in Walton Street following surface road works. Because this area is linked to a Royal Licence of 1318 granting permission for the Carmelite friars to build a tunnel between their two properties either side of Walton Street a watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology. However the voids appeared to relate to unmapped early service routes and no significant archaeological features were recorded.

Trinity College Lawn

In August initial excavation work was undertaken at Trinity College by Oxford Archaeology prior to the construction of a post-graduate building in the Wilderness and an attenuation tank under the lawn. The attenuation tank footprint was stripped and a medieval field boundary recorded.

Paradise Square

In September a watching brief during slab removal followed by trial trenching was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology at Paradise Square within the footprint of a new hotel development. The trenching produced evidence for floors, walls and hearths of likely medieval date. There is a possibility that cellar features of possible Late Saxon date are also present although this has yet to be confirmed. The work is ongoing.



Above left: Hearths of likely medieval date at Paradise Square. Right: looking across the site towards the Westgate Centre.

Land at Warren Crescent

In September a targeted watching brief was undertaken at Warren Crescent (near the Churchill Hospital) by John Moore Heritage Services because of the potential for Roman remains on the edge of the Lye Valley. Further intermittent work is planned.

Seacourt Park and Ride

In September a watching brief was undertaken during ground works at Seacourt Park and Ride by John Moore Heritage Services. Intermittent work is ongoing.

Other News

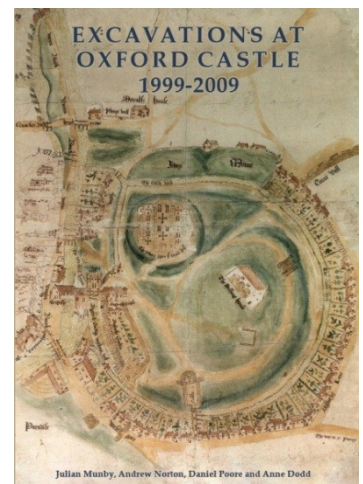
Viking relatives?

A major new DNA study of Late Saxon period skeletal remains is highlighted in the latest edition of the CBA 'British Archaeology' Magazine. The study includes work on some of the burials recovered from the 10th-11th century mass grave recovered from the excavations at St John's College Kendrew Quad on St Giles in 2008. Here 37 mostly young men were apparently brutally killed and dumped into the ditch of a Neolithic henge monument on the outskirts of the city. Archaeologists have debated whether these remains belong to a Viking war band or perhaps victims of the 1002 St Brice's Day massacre of Danish settlers in Oxford. Remarkably the study shows that one of the St John's victims is related to another individual buried in Denmark, either an uncle or a half-brother. The report is open access can be read here: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1101/703405>



Excavations at Oxford Castle – new publication!

I am very pleased to be able to report the publication of Oxford Archaeology's latest monograph in the Thames Valley Landscapes series – Excavations at Oxford Castle, 1999-2009. The volume, by Julian Munby, Andrew Norton, Daniel Poore and Anne Dodd, reports and discusses the results of the excavations, building recording, documentary research, and the specialist finds and environmental analyses relating to work undertaken when the former prison site was transformed into Oxford Castle Quarter in the 2000s. The most substantial results relate to the late Saxon town and its rampart, and to the construction of the Norman motte and bailey castle and its defensive rampart and ditches. More limited information was obtained for the castle in its later medieval form and for its brief refortification during the Parliamentary occupation of Oxford in the Civil War. The book costs £25 and can be purchased from Oxbow Books.



Festival of Archaeology

Thanks are due to Oxford Preservation Trust for organising an archaeological walk around the new Westgate Centre and also a talk by Tom Hassall at the Castle Resource Centre as part of the annual Festival of Archaeology event in July.

Westgate Advisory Panel

I am pleased to report that the advisory panel established to provide additional oversight of the large Westgate excavation in 2015 and 2016 met in July to review the progress being made by Oxford Archaeology towards the publication of the excavation. A voluminous post-excavation report has been produced and approved and now OA will get down to the business of completing the specialist reports and publication text which is likely to take at least three years.

David Radford, Archaeologist, Oxford City Council