

NOTES

Archaeological Work in Oxford, 2017

After several years of significant archaeological investigations in the historic core of Oxford 2017 saw a change of focus with detailed investigations taking place in previously unexplored parts of the Thames floodplain along the route of the proposed Oxford Flood Alleviation Channel. The full results of these investigations are to follow; however, one widely publicized discovery was a previously unrecorded medieval metalled track approaching Oxford from the west that had been sealed below floodplain alluvium. Elsewhere in the city the creation of new sports facilities on the Oxford Road on the way to Horspath resulted in the first sizable investigation of a Roman settlement site at Oxford for over a decade. Another significant Roman site was investigated towards the end of the year at the former Swan Motors plot close to the known pottery manufacturing site at Between Towns Road, Cowley. There was also a surprising piece of new information from the city's historic core, four scientific dates from the buried remains of the late Anglo-Saxon town rampart at New College. The results, which were obtained from material recovered during investigations in previous years, are consistent with an eighth-century date for at least part of the earthwork here. The full results of this work will no doubt generate considerable debate. Short summaries of selected investigations from 2017 are provided below.

SELECTED PROJECTS

Oxford Road Sports Ground

In January an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by Salford Archaeology on land adjacent to Oxford Road and the BMW sports ground. Further to previous investigations at this site a number of ditches and pits were investigated indicating the presence of late Iron-Age through to second-century AD settlement and associated enclosures and field boundaries. Between May and October a phased excavation and watching brief was undertaken to record parts of the multi-period settlement affected by the laying out of new football and cricket pitches and an access track. The features recorded included postholes, pits, enclosure ditches, field boundaries, and a single crouched inhumation.

New College, Holywell Street, Former Morris Garage

Between June and October an excavation and photographic recording was undertaken at the site of the former William Morris car garage at New College by OA. The brick foundations of the early twentieth-century Morris Garage (which gave its name to the MG car mark and where Morris designed his first car in 1914) were uncovered along with two concrete and brick car pits. Detailed recording was undertaken of the remains which will be partially preserved below a new accommodation building.

The Eagle and Child Pub and Green's Café, Nos. 50 and 51 St Giles

In July evaluation trenches were excavated by TVAS to the rear of Green's Café on St Giles. The investigation, which was constrained by the limited accessible space, revealed two likely medieval walls and a post-medieval pit and postholes.

No. 1 Fisher Row

In July test pits were excavated within No. 1 Fisher Row by JMHS. The grade II listed building is of eighteenth-century date and encompasses a ground-floor vaulted storage area that may pre-date the three-storey red brick town house. The test pits demonstrated that earlier floors survive below the current stone flag floor which itself may be nineteenth century in date. An earlier clay floor was recorded and below this the remains of a brick floor was encountered along with the remains of a hearth. The scheme was subsequently amended to preserve the brick floor and hearth.

No. 12 Crick Road (Park Town)

In August an evaluation was undertaken to the rear of No. 12 Crick Road by JMHS. The trenching revealed a large pit, the excavated sample of which contained nineteen sherds of middle Iron-Age pottery.

Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme Evaluation Trenching

Between August and October archaeological trenching was undertaken by OA along the route of the proposed Oxford Flood Alleviation Channel as part of a comprehensive programme of evaluation. A total of 189 trenches were excavated in the floodplain within the City of Oxford and the Vale of the White Horse. An extensive programme of soil and sediment sampling from archaeological features, paleochannels and alluvial sequences was completed and allowed a comprehensive set of scientific dates to be obtained, giving an almost unbroken c.8,000-year chronology of floodplain evolution spanning the Mesolithic to modern periods. A full summary of the results of this large project is beyond the scope of this note, but one evocative discovery was a previously unknown metalled stone causeway encountered to the south of Willow Walk (south of the Botley Road), complete with cart ruts and with a late-medieval horseshoe recovered from its surface. The project also gave the Research Laboratory for Archaeology and the History of Art a chance to test a new refined approach to optically stimulated luminescence dating on ridge and furrow earthworks. Thanks are due to the Environment Agency and OA for facilitating this experimental work.

Wadham College, Undergraduate and Aspiration Centre

In September an archaeological evaluation was undertaken by OA at Wadham College next to the Junior Common Room and the Goddard Building within the proposed footprint of the new Undergraduate and Aspiration Centre. A single burial was encountered, likely to belong to the medieval Austin friary which occupied this site between 1268 and the Dissolution. Pits dating to the twelfth or thirteenth century were also present. These were tentatively interpreted as evidence for quarrying. There were also several large indeterminate features that likely related to activity to the rear of the properties laid out along Holywell Street in the early to mid seventeenth century.

Student Castle, Osney Lane

In September and November trial trenching was undertaken by OA at the proposed 'Student Castle' development on the site of the former business units at Osney Lane. The site is adjacent to the railway and the site of the (now demolished) Great Western Railway goods transfer shed. Pits dating from the mid thirteenth to fourteenth century were recorded at considerable depth, sealed by modern made ground; these are likely to be associated with the precinct of Osney abbey.

Somerville College, Catherine Hughes Building, Phase 1, Walton Street and Little Clarendon Street

In June and between October and November an evaluation and targeted excavation was undertaken by OA to explore the projected line of the Civil War defences and examine waste

pits belonging to former post-medieval and Victorian buildings on Little Clarendon Street and Walton Street. Whilst the line of the Civil War ditch was identified by the evaluation trench along the frontage of Walton Street the anticipated return was not identified during the subsequent excavation as the area had been extensively quarried in the post-medieval period. Sizable early modern ceramic and faunal assemblages were recovered from associated waste and quarry pits.

Swan Motors, Between Towns Road

In December a watching brief during demolition works and trial trenching was undertaken by the Southampton Archaeological Unit at the former Swan Motor site on Between Towns Road. A number of ditches containing significant amounts of Roman pottery were recorded and further work was programmed for 2018.

DAVID RADFORD, CITY ARCHAEOLOGIST