

# NOTES

## Archaeological Work in Oxford, 2019

The year saw a number of modest-scale central and suburban excavations covering a wider range of historic periods and site types than has been the norm over the last several years. Prehistoric settlement remains were examined at Littlemore and New Marston, and Roman remains at Littlemore, New Marston, Cowley, and Headington. Within the historic core of Oxford, a number of well-studied medieval sites saw further limited investigation, notably Osney abbey and the hospital of St John the Baptist. Our understanding of the extent and character of the medieval town was also enhanced by the investigation of extra-mural settlement remains on Parks Road and at Paradise Square. Other sites include the former medieval and post-medieval barn at Holywell, the Royalist Civil War rampart on Mansfield Road, and the remains of an eighteenth-century formal garden at Trinity College.

### SELECTED PROJECTS

#### *Osney Power Station, Arthur Street*

In March OA undertook an evaluation to the south of the old Osney Power Station building in Arthur Street. The site is located partly within the projected extent of the precinct of Osney abbey. The trenching revealed floodplain deposits overlaid by thick makeup layers and structural remains likely to be associated with the medieval abbey. These included a substantial robber trench, a shallow wall foundation, a stone drain, and traces of gravel surfaces. Associated finds included roof and floor tiles from a structure or structures of likely utilitarian character, a scrap of leather and herring bones. Horn cores of likely fifteenth- or sixteenth-century date were also recorded. Previous work on the abbey precinct has suggested that this area may be associated with the abbey farm.

#### *Magdalen College Kitchen Yard*

In March OA maintained a watching brief during geotechnical investigations within Magdalen College Kitchen Yard. The site is of interest because of the potential for remains to be preserved relating to the medieval hospital of St John the Baptist and the early phases of the college, which was established in the fifteenth century. The trial pits revealed the massive stepped foundations of the fifteenth-century college range to the north, and the foundations of the seventeenth-century range to the west, which appeared to reuse an earlier medieval wall. The wall extended well above the levels of the medieval infirmary floors recorded during previous excavations and may be a surviving internal wall of the hospital infirmary.

#### *Land adjacent to Littlemore Hospital*

In April TVAS undertook an excavation and watching brief on land to the west of Littlemore Hospital. Previously evaluation work at this site had identified a locally rare example of an Iron-Age banjo enclosure, and the new development was designed to preserve this in green open space. The excavation revealed a series of large boundary ditches, smaller gullies, and a pit that formed the corner of a large field. The ditches had silted up and then been recut on several occasions. Four cremation burials of likely Roman date were also recorded. The evidence suggested that the enclosure and field formed part of pastoral landscape originating in the middle Iron Age that continued in use into the early Roman period.

*The Harlow Centre, Raymund Road, New Marston (the Swan School Site)*

Between April and May Cotswold Archaeology carried out an excavation at the site of the new Swan School in New Marston. The excavation revealed enclosures and droveways associated with middle and late Iron-Age rural settlement. This landscape was subsequently adapted and added to in the Roman period with one well-defined Roman enclosure containing a well-preserved third-century mortaria kiln. A public open day was held in May.

*Gibbs Crescent, Osney*

In May OA undertook an archaeological evaluation at Gibbs Crescent within the projected extent of the precinct of Osney abbey. Trenches were excavated through alluvial deposits and make-up deposits associated with the 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 modern-made ground relating to the construction of the nearby railway.

*New College School, Savile Road*

Between May and September Museum of London Archaeology (MoLA) carried out intermittent archaeological recording at New College School. The first phase of works involved a watching brief during the excavation of small geotechnical pits dug to examine the nature of the foundations of the former school building. Subsequently two trenches were excavated to further understand the character of the Royalist Civil War rampart here and an undated loam/soil bank below. The trenches were excavated in grids and spits and sieved to ensure that any redeposited prehistoric flint or pottery was recorded. Only isolated flints and a small amount of Roman and medieval pottery were recovered. Further work was planned in 2020.

*Master's Field, Balliol College*

In May a second phase of trial trenching was commenced by OA 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 barn complex which is known to have survived here into the nineteenth century. The trenching revealed the walls of the barn. Subsequently between July and September further excavation revealed parts of the floors, walls and entrance of the medieval and post-medieval tithe barn. One layer produced finds that included clay pipe, a musket ball and a coin of Charles I, likely associated with the use of the barn during the Civil War.

*Headington School*

Between June and August Foundations Archaeology carried out a phased excavation at Headington School prior to the construction of a new teaching block. The excavation revealed a series of large ditches and pits associated with Roman domestic settlement.

*Armstrong Road, Littlemore*

Between June and July a geophysical survey by Sumo Geophysics and evaluation trenching by OA were undertaken at land near Armstrong Road prior to the development of the area for housing. The trenching identified late Iron-Age and/or early Roman rural settlement activity along with mid and late Roman features. Pits, ditches, and post-holes were recorded with finds including two Roman glass beads. Subsequently between November and December an initial phase of archaeological excavation recorded a series of well-cut shallow circular early Iron-Age pits along with concentrations of Roman pits and ditches.

*Paradise Square*

In September OA undertook a watching brief during slab removal followed by trial trenching at Paradise Square within the footprint of a new hotel development. The trenching produced evidence of floors, walls and hearths of likely medieval date located just outside the former

West Gate of the town. Subsequently between October and December OA undertook a targeted excavation revealing evidence for a timber building or buildings that evolved into a substantial stone structure which was then remodelled with the addition and removal of walls. The sequence was provisionally dated as spanning the eleventh to fourteenth centuries. 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 that some form of artisan production/process took place within the later phases of use. Associated with these buildings was a series of pits containing well-preserved bone and ceramic evidence, and large amounts of charcoal.

*Trinity College Gardens*

Between August and December OA undertook intermittent excavations at Trinity College prior to the construction of a postgraduate building in the former 'Wilderness' part of the garden and an attenuation tank under the lawn. The tank footprint was stripped and a medieval field boundary recorded. Excavations near to the Parks Road frontage revealed a medieval oven, pits and plot boundaries associated with medieval tenements that formerly fronted onto the road. Elsewhere traces of serpentine gravel paths and the remains of a large circular clay and stone-wall lined water feature, with a massive stone lined bottle-shaped soakaway or well beneath, were recorded. These features are likely to relate to the formal garden design shown on the 1733 illustration by William Williams.

*Murco Service Station, Between Towns Road*

In November MoLA undertook an archaeological evaluation at the site of the former Murco 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 just to the south.

*Christ Church, Peckwater Quad, Staircase 9*

In December, historic building recording and a watching brief were undertaken by Keevill Heritage Ltd during minor works within Staircase 9. A number of likely Saxo-Norman pits were recorded containing pottery and animal bone along with a rotary quern fragment.

*The Mitre, High Street*

Between September and December OA undertook an intermittent watching brief and historic building recording during comprehensive upgrading works on the Mitre, a seventeenth-century coaching inn with thirteenth-century and later cellars. Targeted excavation was undertaken prior to the replacement of many of the service routes in the rear yard and the construction of a new porter's kiosk and lodge for Lincoln College on Turl Street. Observed remains included stone walls, occupation deposits (including a very young juvenile burial, probably below an internal floor) and yard surfaces.

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