

# Excavations and Building Survey at the former Nuffield Press, Temple Cowley, Oxfordshire (Site of Temple Cowley Manor House)

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## SUMMARY

*Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook an evaluation and building survey ahead of development at the former Nuffield Press premises, Oxford Road, Temple Cowley (NGR SP 548 046). This site was the original location of Temple Cowley Manor, but it also contained a number of important post-medieval standing structures, including the Oxford Military College buildings (1876-96) designed by T. G. Jackson and H. G. W. Drinkwater and structures built by William Morris following his acquisition of the site for car production in 1912. Whilst the Jackson buildings were to be retained in the development, several others, including one which incorporated the former north wall of the manor house, were to be demolished. Excavations and measured building survey were carried out on the manor house remains and a photographic record made of the standing structures.*

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE (Fig. 1)

### *Phase 1 (13th-15th centuries)*

Although 11th-century pottery was recovered from the site, the first recognisable phase of activity seems to have begun during the 13th century. There was no definite evidence for masonry structures during this period, but there was a certain amount of circumstantial evidence pointing toward their probable existence. The majority of features ascribed to this phase clustered around the site of the later 17th-century manor house. At the southern end of Trench 12 a group of four sub-circular pits was revealed (12/101, 12/84, 12/103 and 12/123). The pits were all filled with a similar mixture of limestone cobbles and mortar-rich deposits and three out of four contained pottery dated to the 13th century. The spatial organisation of the pits might suggest that they were used as post-pits to hold timber uprights, but if so no coherent structural plan was discernible. A fifth pit in nearby Trench 11 (11/133) was also filled with mortar and limestone rubble. Although it was square rather than circular and deeper than the other pits, the very close similarity of fills suggest that the pits were all contemporary. A group of intercutting pits and postholes in Trench 9 may also date to this phase on the basis of limited ceramic evidence.

The upper fill of pit 11/133 was truncated by the shallow wall slot 11/100 which formed part of a rectangular structure (Building E). The full extent of the structure is unknown as it was cut away to the south by the construction of the 17th-century manor house (Building A). Enough survived to suggest that it had an approximate east-west orientation with an entrance half way down its northern wall.

To the north in Trench 5 a large, steep sided pit (5/1) lay immediately to the north of a length of curved ditch (5/3), which appeared to be a robber trench. A few metres to the north-west a narrow linear feature, probably a boundary, was revealed within Trench 7 (7/10). Immediately to the north of that were three shallow linear features which are probably best interpreted as truncated garden features (7/4, 7/6 and 7/8).



Fig. 1. Trench location plan and phasing.

A masonry wall 6/29 in the western end of Trench 6 probably belonged to this period. The backfill of the construction trench contained a single sherd of 13th-century pottery. The wall was part of a long rectangular structure (Building D) which was first located with certainty on the Cowley parish enclosure map of 1853.

#### *Phase 2 (15th-18th centuries)*

During the 15th and 16th centuries activity seems to have been relatively limited. A pit was dug to the north of the manor (12/89) but in general the area remained undisturbed allowing a thick layer of soil to build up (12/91). During the 17th century the manor house was constructed or remodelled into the basic form which survived until modern times.

#### *Phase 3 (18th-20th centuries)*

It was clear from stratigraphic evidence that Building B was not part of the original 17th-century manor but was built some time between the end of the 17th century and 1886 when it appeared on the OS 1st edition map. The extent and evolution of modern buildings around the manor are described in the map regression analysis contained in the full client report. It is sufficient to note here that the excavations added little to the documentary research.

### THE BUILDING SURVEY

#### *The Manor House*

The manor house of Temple Cowley was demolished in 1957 after it was deemed to be structurally unsound. Historic photographs of *c.* 1938 show the building heavily shored and it appears to have been derelict for some time before its final demolition. Part of the rear northern wall of the manor house survived and was incorporated into modern industrial buildings. This wall was recorded before its demolition.

Historical photographs, drawings and a 1954 survey of the building provided evidence of the demolished building which was of limestone, with ashlar to the elevations and rubble facing elsewhere with a stone slate roof. The front elevation was largely symmetrical with a central doorway flanked by two bay windows to the ground floor, two projecting chimney stacks and two gables breaking the roof line. The building was of two storeys, with two levels of attics and three cellar areas. From the interpretation of the documentary sources it appears that the building was of several phases of construction, characterised by different roof and floor levels. A 'phase I' building was identified as a three-unit plan of hall-house or derived type. This building had been subsequently added to, possibly representing three further phases of construction. However, due to the nature of the surviving evidence the phasing of the additions could not be conclusively argued or securely dated.

From the fabric examination of the surviving manor house wall a number of features, such as blocked windows, doors and scars of former returning walls, were observed. The previously external stone architraves of three windows had been retained within the modern industrial buildings. During the demolition of the wall a watching brief was carried out. Some pieces of worked stone were recovered from the walling; these appeared to be post-medieval in date and were not *in situ* in the wall. Stone window jambs and sills were, however, recorded *in situ* before demolition. Additionally, two areas of cellars were partially excavated and recorded.

*The Jackson Buildings*

The surviving east and south ranges are all that was constructed of a quadrangle proposed for the Oxford Military College. Built in 1877 and 1882 respectively, they are of note principally because of their re-use as a multi-storey car factory from 1912. In a sealed basement in the east wing, the furnace and controls were discovered for Jackson's innovative ducted hot-air heating system. These have been preserved *in situ*.

*The Drinkwater Building (Building Y)*

This building at the west of the site had been built in 1882 as a science laboratory for the Military College. During the Morris era it served as an electrical substation and as a practice room for the works band. During the war it was used for civil defence purposes. Measured floor plans and a photographic record were made prior to demolition.

*A-Shop (Building Z)*

This large corrugated iron-clad, steel-framed single-storey four-aisled building occupied the whole of the former Military College parade ground. It was thought to have been built c. 1914 as the first purpose-built car production building on the Cowley site. A measured floor-plan and photographic record was made prior to demolition. During the First World War, Morris was engaged in munitions work and it has come to light that a narrow gauge railway was built during the war, connecting the building to Cowley station. Part of the building was used as the Works Fire Station during the Second World War and surviving evidence for this was recorded. The survey failed to find conclusive proof that the structure was built originally for car production, and it remains a possibility that it was instead built for munitions work.

## CONCLUSIONS

The front façade of the manor house, shown in documentary sources, suggests a 17th-century date. There was no direct evidence to show that a manor house existed on the site before the 17th century, although the results of the excavation suggest that the site had been occupied in one form or another since the 13th century. The 'phase I' three-unit plan building may have medieval origins and certain aspects of the evidence point towards the early construction of masonry buildings and the robbed outline of one such building was located (Building E).

The survey of the later buildings has proved interesting as few relevant archives appear to have survived either at Rover or at the British Motor Industry Heritage Centre at Gaydon. Not only was the opportunity taken to make a lasting record of several buildings of regional significance, but several new insights were gained into the functioning of the site during both its military and car-manufacturing phases.

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