

NOTES

Archaeological Work in Oxford, 2014

A number of tasks relating to the Oxford Archaeological Action Plan (2013–18) were completed in 2014. The Urban Archaeological Database was moved into the HBSMR system that holds the County Historic Environment Record. The City Council archaeologist can now provide HER data for the City Council area and has entered the outstanding backlog of Oxford HER sites. In order to harmonise arrangements for commercial searches between the two authorities, the City Council has introduced a charging policy in line with that of the County Archaeological Services. Other Action Plan achievements include the production of an Archaeological Monitoring Statement for 2014, which is available on the City Council website, and the completion of a joint project with OA for Historic England looking at the assessment of archaeological remains of national significance in urban areas. The Historic England report, entitled 'Assessing and Mapping Significant Heritage Assets in a Medieval University City', will be made available on the Archaeological Data Service website.

The level of development-led archaeological investigation remained high this year. Significant investigations at New College's fourteenth-century kitchen continued from the previous year, an important excavation took place at Littlemore Nunnery over the spring and summer, and another major project at Magdalen College began in December (which will be dealt with in next year's summary). A range of medium- and small-scale investigations have resulted, as with previous years, from college infrastructure projects, but also from a notable increase in commercial projects associated with hospitality and residential developments. Selected sites are summarised below.

New College Kitchen

Between January and May recording work continued at New College kitchen. Further investigations into the medieval kitchen floor and service routes in the yard were undertaken by OA, and detailed recording of exposed building fabric was completed by Roland Harris. The works allowed investigation of the primary roof, associated with Hugh Herland, the pre-eminent English medieval master carpenter. Wall plates and rafter feet were recorded along with an intact arch-braced principal truss previously hidden behind the nineteenth-century east wall of the kitchen. In the buttery, surviving fourteenth-century floor boards were noted below layers of more recent flooring. A programme of dendrochronological sampling carried out by Dan Miles has provided felling dates of winter 1382/3 for the timbers of the buttery roof, floor and east wall. Floor joists, reused in later repairs to the buttery roof, very probably derive from the hall floor, which was replaced in 1722; these timbers were felled in the winter of 1387/8. The hall door was also shown to be late fourteenth century in date.

New College, Kitchen Yard Cellar Link

In December an archaeological excavation was undertaken by OA within the kitchen yard at New College prior to the creation of an underground link between two existing wine cellars. The excavation was located a few metres outside of the excavations carried out recently within New College kitchen. The work revealed a nineteenth-century drain overlying intercutting pits of medieval to post-medieval date containing likely kitchen waste. The assemblages from these pits included significant quantities of bone waste from the processing and consumption of larger land animals, a very large assemblage of smaller bones from fish and fowl, and

abundant charred plant remains. These assemblages will complement the evidence gained during the recent investigations within the kitchen.

New College, Savile House, Mansfield Road

Between September and November OA carried out an archaeological evaluation, topographical survey and auger survey of the upstanding Royalist Civil War defensive bank at Savile House. The evaluation revealed a posthole cut into the Summertown–Radley terrace gravel, overlain by a series of deposits forming an earth bank. A shallow, mixed deposit of sand, gravel and silt, which could suggest the stripping of topsoil and trample, was overlain by a bank of re-deposited loessic subsoil, in turn overlain by a very compacted layer of re-deposited sand and gravel. An Optically Stimulated Luminescence sample from the re-deposited loess produced a date range of AD 880–1045 (X6664), suggesting that the Royalist defensive line in this location utilised a pre-existing landscape feature, perhaps a late Anglo-Saxon agricultural earthwork.

Minchery Farm, Littlemore

Between April and October an archaeological excavation was undertaken by JMHS on the site of the twelfth- to sixteenth-century Benedictine nunnery at Minchery Farm, Littlemore. The excavation was undertaken prior to the construction of a new hotel complex to the north of the up-standing dormitory range of the nunnery. The excavation identified inconclusive evidence for a small rectangular church, likely to date to the priory's establishment in the mid twelfth century, replaced in the thirteenth century by a more substantial church consisting of a choir, crossing tower, nave and belfry. Ninety-two burials were excavated. The most prominent burial was a female aged 45+, likely to be a prioress, who was interred in a constructed limestone cist, the foot of which was located at the exact centre of the crossing tower (Fig. 1). Burials were recovered from the choir, north transept and the nave, with the remaining burials largely confined to a small area outside of the church, located to the east of the choir. One particularly interesting burial at the west end of the nave was a young female (aged 19–25), buried in a prone position and partially truncated by a later infant burial (Fig. 2). The age of the burials ranged from neonate to 60+ years, with thirty-five females and twenty-eight males identified.

East Minchery Farm Allotments, Littlemore

Between February and March TVAS undertook trial trenching and a strip and record excavation at the former East Minchery Farm allotments. A single small early Anglo-Saxon



Fig. 1. Stone cist burial. Photo: Paul Murray, JMHS.



Fig. 2. Prone burial. Photo: Paul Murray, JMHS.

Sunken Featured Building was identified. It measured 2.64 metres by 1.7 metres and was 0.14 metres deep. Four associated postholes were found and charcoal from the fill of the structure produced a radio carbon date of Cal AD 546–638 (UBA–25532).

Jesus College, First Quad Attenuation Tank

Between April and May a small excavation was undertaken by OA within the First Quad of Jesus College prior to the insertion of a water attenuation tank. The excavation revealed a brushed mortar surface which may have been the original seventeenth-century surface of the quadrangle. Below this was a series of tipped layers of soil cut by post-medieval pits. A robber trench and wall footing were recorded to one side of the tipped layers, aligned on Market Street. The tipped soil and robbed wall have been provisionally interpreted as the remains of a back-filled cellar, belonging to a fourteenth- to fifteenth-century hall. Further pits were recorded below the tip layers associated with activity pre-dating the cellar. At the base of the sequence, a charcoal layer was sampled and patches of wind-blown loess natural were observed.

New Sports Building, Headington School, Headington Road

In May an archaeological watching brief was undertaken by OA at Headington School during ground works for the construction of a new sports building and classroom extension. The watching brief revealed a cluster of early Iron-Age pits. The large fragments of pottery, burnt animal bone and cereal remains recovered from the fills of the pit cluster suggest that they derive from domestic activity in the near vicinity.

Luther Court, Thames Street

Between May and June a watching brief during building demolition, trial trenching and archaeological bore holes were undertaken by OA at Luther Court. The site is located between the historic route of the Shire Lake channel of the Thames and the precinct of the medieval Dominican friary to the north. Pits were recorded containing a large numbers of horn cores, indicating that hide preparation, glue-making or some other process connected with leather-working was carried out in the vicinity in the early modern period. Bore holes were targeted on a deep channel crossing the southern part of the site. The deepest organic sediment from

the channel, a silty peat, produced a Mesolithic radiocarbon date of Cal BC 6400–6230 (SUERC-54810).

Land at Barns Road, former Community Centre Site

Between May and November an archaeological excavation and watching brief was undertaken by Avon Archaeological Unit off Barns Road, Cowley, prior to the development of a former community centre site for flats. The work recorded an initial phase of eleventh- to thirteenth-century field or enclosure ditches. In the late-medieval or post-medieval period a series of quarry pits were dug, probably to obtain the local sand-silt for building work. Later activity included the construction of a series of large wall foundations for agricultural buildings in the late eighteenth century.

University of Oxford Botanic Garden, High Street

In August OA recorded a well which had been exposed towards the southern corner of the walled seventeenth-century Botanic Garden. The well was revealed by contractors working to clear the felled branches of an old black pine tree which had partially collapsed. The stone-lined well was largely filled with water and appears to have been a relatively early feature within the garden.

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