

New Library Facility, St. Hilda's College, Oxford



Building Recording



Oxford Archaeology

December 2003

Client Name: St. Hilda's College

Issue N^o: 1

OA Job N^o: 1718

NGR: SP 5225 0590

St. Hilda's College

**NEW LIBRARY FACILITY AND BASEMENT,
ST HILDA'S COLLEGE,
COWLEY PLACE, OXFORD**

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGY

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New Library facility and basement, St Hilda's College, Cowley Place, Oxford.

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

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New Library facility and basement, St Hilda's College, Cowley Place, Oxford.

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

SUMMARY

Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned to carry out a historic building photographic record of the east boundary wall in front of the library. This wall was built as the east boundary to Cowley House, on the site of earlier tenement frontages. It is constructed of limestone ashlar blocks on the east side, and red brick on the west side. The library wall was identified as having historic potential, due to its location. The wall is going to be taken down and rebuilt as part of the new library extension works. Photographs of both sides of the wall were required to create an archive showing its current position and condition and to aid the rebuilding work after the library extension is complete.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Blackwood Architects, acting on behalf of the St. Hilda's College, Oxford, to undertake a photographic building recording at New Library facility and basement, St Hilda's College, Cowley Place, Oxford (NGR: SP 5225 0590). (Figs 1 - 3)

1.2 Aims and objectives

1.2.1 The main aim of the building recording was to provide a photographic archive of the wall, prior to its dismantlement. The record will also be an aid to the rebuilding of the wall on its current location, after the completion of the library extension works.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 The recording took place on 25th October 2003, and the recording was primarily of a photographic nature using 35 mm film (black and white prints and colour slides). These photographs were taken to aid the reconstruction of the wall after the library building works are completed. Additional digital shots were taken to provide photographs for use in the report. A limited amount of documentary research was also undertaken to provide an historical context for the recording. This was principally undertaken at Oxford Archaeology. A site archive including the photographs, negatives, the current document and other documentary material will be deposited with the County Museum Service or other agreed body.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND LOCATION

2.1 Geographical Location and Topography

- 2.1.1 The site of the development is at St Hilda's College, at the north end of Cowley Place, just off the Plain and is located c. 30 m east of the River Cherwell. The site is outside the historic core of Oxford, but within the medieval suburb of St. Clements (NGR SP 5225 0590).
- 2.1.2 The geology of the site is Flood Plain Drift Geology, comprising Terrace and River Gravels (sands and gravels) above Oxford Clay. A geotechnical survey undertaken in 1998 found Drift geology to a depth of c. 2.7 m. Overlying this was modern made ground which comprised tarmac over crushed stone over sand, gravel and brick.

2.2 Historical Background

- 2.2.1 The current wall is said to have been dismantled and moved to the west, to accommodate the new width of the street pavement on the east side (pers. comm. Jane Reed, St. Hilda's College). However, the wall seems to be on the alignment of some tenement frontages, that appear on Loggan's map of 1675 and Taylor's map of 1750 (Figure 2). On Loggan's map a series of houses runs roughly north-south, to the east of which is an area of open land, with what Loggan refers to as a "ruined fortification", which was the eastern defences of the Oxford city boundary.
- 2.2.2 Taylor's map of 1750 shows the tenement wall existing, with some new buildings to the west. The first edition OS map of 1878 shows two cottages built towards the north end of Cowley Place. Their tenement plots are defined on the east side by the north-south wall, respecting the old tenement boundary, shown on Loggan's map.
- 2.2.3 St Hilda's College was founded by Dorothea Bell, Principal of Cheltenham Ladies College, in 1893. She purchased Cowley House (St Hilda's Hall), which is situated to the south of the cottages, on Cowley Place. A photograph of the hall (Figure 4), shows the wall was continued along the front of the hall, still on the alignment shown on Loggan's map. Today the wall finishes to the north of the hall, and returns to the west.

3 DESCRIPTION

3.1 General Description

- 3.1.1 The wall follows a curved path, running north-south, which is reflected by the street on the east side. The wall returns at the south end, to the west, just north of St. Hilda's hall. The wall is approximately 11 metres long, with the return approximately 2.5 metres long (Plate 1).
- 3.1.2 A pair of gates is located towards the south end of the wall, framed by three gateposts (Plate 2). A further gatepost is located at the north end of the wall. These posts are constructed of limestone ashlar blocks and are decorated with carved panelling on the east and west faces. A miniature s-profiled string course runs around the top of the column and they are capped with a capital block, carved on the east and west faces with ornamental roundels. Further string courses run around the top of the capital, which finishes in a pyramid. The decor for the gate-posts has

neo-classical qualities and reflects the roundels found on the front of Cowley House, which was built by Dr. Humphrey Sibthorpe, between 1775 and 1783 (Rayner, 7). It seems likely that the gateposts were constructed and the north half of the wall was rebuilt at this time, to give access to Dr. Sibthorpe's house and stables.

3.1.3 On dismantlement of the wall, it was discovered that the posts are constructed of facing stones set around a concrete core, with an iron bar from which to hang the gates. It is probable that these are therefore 20th century replacements for the originals.

3.2 East Face

3.2.1 The east face is constructed of limestone ashlar blocks, bonded in thin, straight joints with a lime-rich mortar (Plate 7). The wall is evenly coursed and capped with limestone block coping that protrudes out from the wall. The blocks are of even size, but some are larger, and span two courses. Some blocks are severely weathered and cracked and some blocks have been replaced by new stones (Plate 3).

3.2.2 The north end of the wall is shown in old photographs to have had a pair of gates, which have now gone. In their approximate position is a set of iron railings set into a low wall, which extend past the two cottages, and butts the south wall of Magdalen School (Plate 1).

3.2.3 Approximately halfway along the length of the wall, is a pair of wooden doors, which have been inserted into the wall, cutting across courses. They are a later addition to the wall and may have been for receiving post (Plate 3).

3.2.4 The south end of the wall, beyond the last gatepost, is constructed of less uniform limestone blocks, which are more weathered. This end of the wall has been re-pointed in a hard, unsympathetic material, which now protrudes out from the stones of the wall (Plate 4). The return is similar in build, with course re-pointing and weathered limestone ashlar blocks (Plate 5).

3.3 West Face

3.3.1 The west (internal) face of the wall is largely obscured by wooden lean-to sheds, with corrugated iron roofs. However, this side of the wall is constructed of red brick, which must butt the stone of the other side. The brick wall is of Flemish bond and capped with limestone blocks. The use of brick may have been a device to save expense, but still providing a substantial wall thickness (Plate 6).

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary

4.1.1 The current wall has been dismantled and rebuilt previously, to accommodate the new width of the street pavement on the east side (pers. comm. Jane Reed, St.

Hilda's College). However, it seems to be on the alignment of tenement plots that date to at least 1675, as shown on Loggan's map.

4.1.2 The wall has been interrupted by a break, just north of St. Hilda's hall. The north half has a return at its south end, which extends west. The fabric suggests that the wall was rebuilt, with gateposts and ashlar masonry, probably at the time of the building of Cowley House. The surviving wall is constructed of largely original stonework with the addition of brickwork on the west side.

4.2 **Conclusion**

4.2.1 The wall that stands today may bear little relation to the original line of the 17th century tenement plots, if it has been moved. However, as a piece of late 18th century construction, contemporary with Cowley House, it bears historical significance to the locality.

Oxford Archaeology
December 2003

APPENDIX I BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES**Published Sources**

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- VCH, 1983 The Victoria History of the County of Oxford Vol. iii. Oxford University.

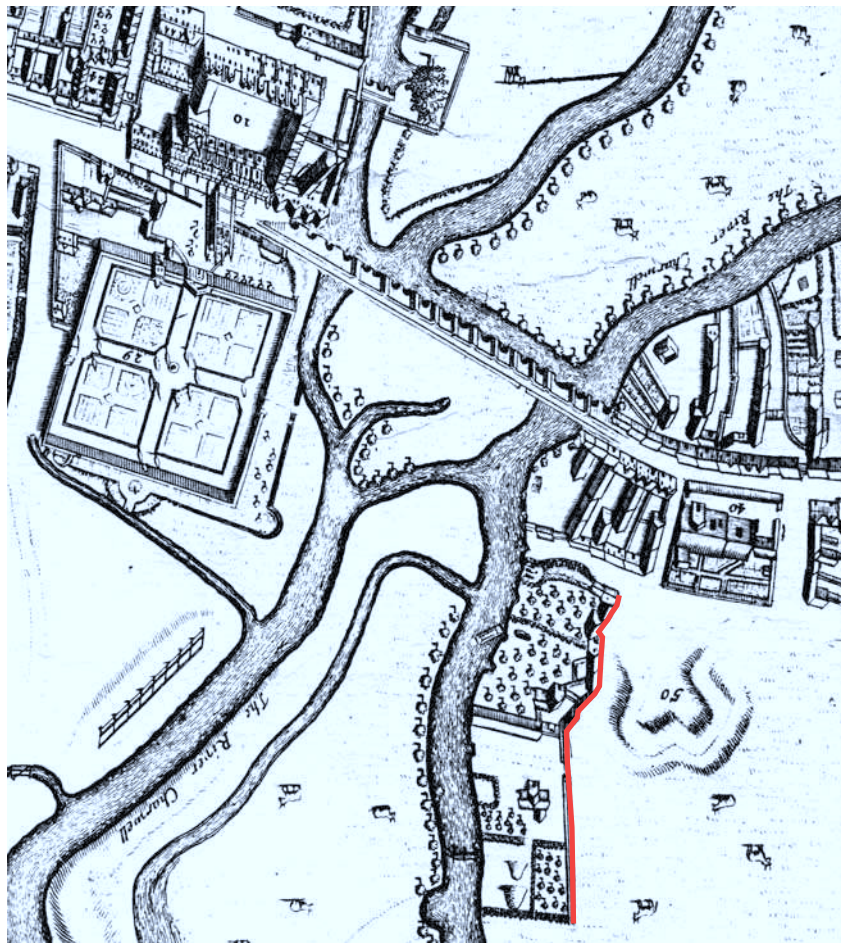
Maps

- Loggan's map of the city of Oxford (1675).
- Taylor's map of the city of Oxford (1750).
- Ordnance Survey 6 :1 mile 1st edition (1878) Oxon
- Ordnance Survey Pathfinder 1:25,000 (1990) Sheet ???



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Figure 1: Site location

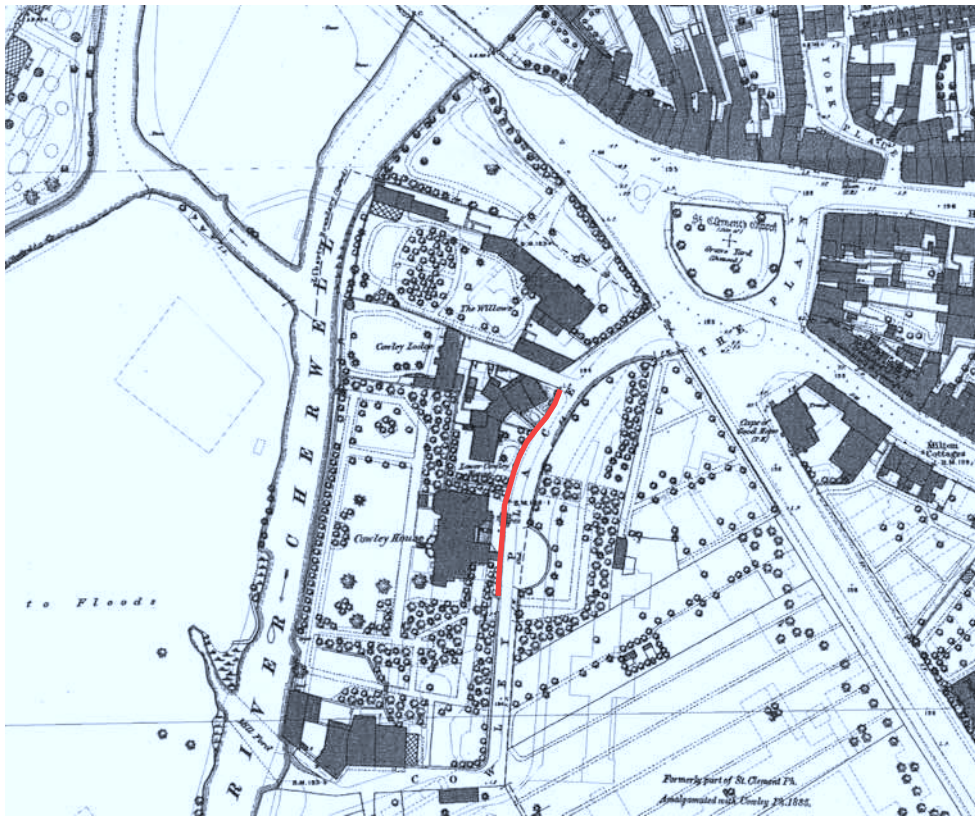


Logan's map of 1675

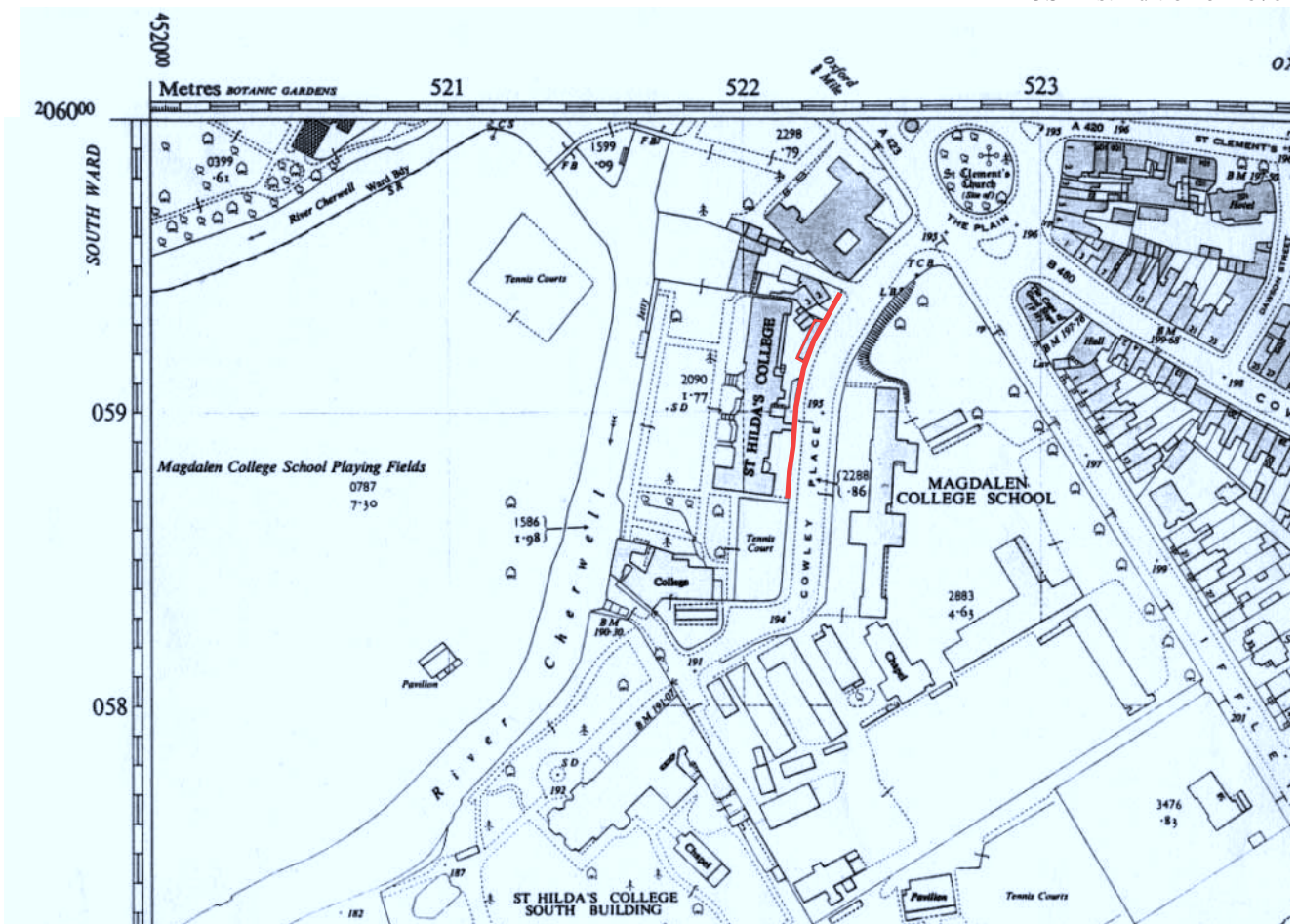


Taylor's map of 1750

Figure 2: Historical maps



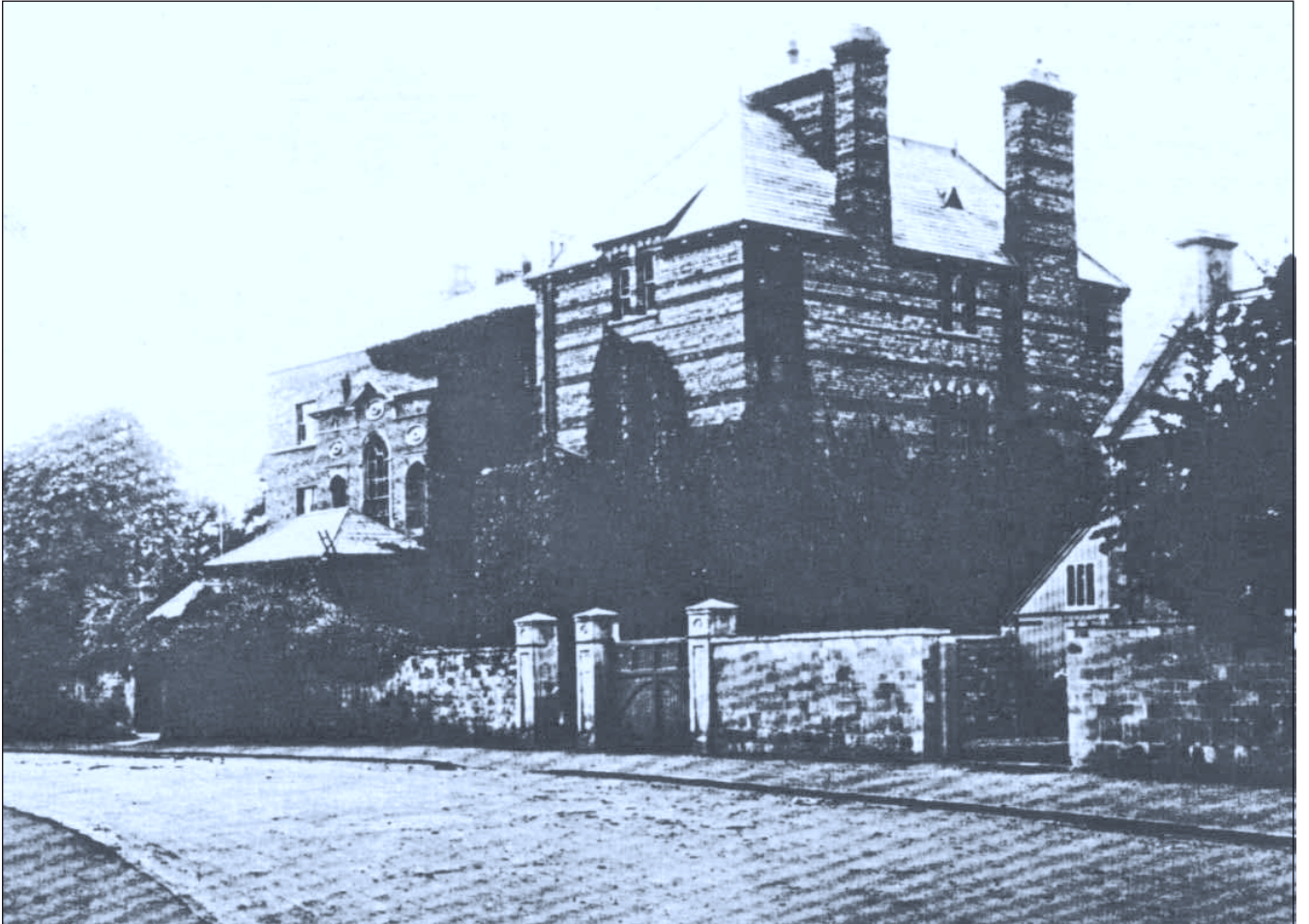
OS First Edition of 1878



OS 1958 Edition showing current buildings on west side of wall

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Figure 3: Ordnance Survey maps of the site.



Historic photograph of Cowley House (Rayner)

Figure 4: Cowley House



Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4



Plate 5



Plate 6



Plate 7: East side of wall



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