

## ORIEL COLLEGE, No. 105, HIGH STREET OXFORD

### Summary

The basement of 105 High Street, Oxford, lies below Chancellors Estate Agents and is undergoing renovation to prevent further subsidence. This is being done by strengthening existing walls with concrete laid in trenches adjacent to the walls. 105 High Street has belonged to Oriel College since the 16th century, and is a tenement within the original planned Saxon town. The Oxford Archaeological Unit excavated a small trench in the NW corner of the basement in December 1994. The trench measured 1.45 m by 0.72 m, and was dug to a depth of 1.06 m, where natural gravel was located. The top of the natural was encountered 3.23 m below the present street level. Two pit features were identified, and were part excavated, within the confines of the trench.

### Results

The earliest deposits identified were a series of superimposed layers of sandy loam and red-brown sandy clay thought to be the backfill of a cut pit feature, the S edge of which cut natural gravel. The latest of these layers, context 4, was cut by a large feature, interpreted as a pit (context 7). The feature was at least 1.20 m wide (NS axis) and 0.91 m deep. The fills of the feature were generally sandy loams with charcoal flecks, and contained frequent animal bone inclusions. A deposit of daub/fired clay, context 11, lay against the S edge of the pit over fill 6 and below 3. The deposit may have derived from a nearby structure which had been demolished. The upper fill of the pit (3) contained one sherd of shell tempered pottery probably dating to the early medieval period.

The upper fills of both pits were sealed by a shallow layer of gravel, upon which the current limestone slab floor was laid. Several attempts had been made to strengthen the basement walls, with rough patches of limestone mixed with red bricks inserted into the original limestone masonry. Part of the rebuild extended over the present floor.

### Conclusions

The limited nature of the investigation makes overall interpretation difficult. The pit features may have functioned as storage pits before being infilled. As on other central Oxford sites, early rubbish (or cellar) pits near the street frontage often contain burnt daub from late-Saxon timber-framed buildings, and these are typically preserved below the floors of later medieval cellars.

The trench was not wide enough to reveal the full extent of the features, and thereby work out a level from which they may have been originally dug. It is possible that contemporary ground levels would have been truncated at the time of construction of the basement.

Ref. H.E. Salter, *Survey of Oxford*,(1960), SE(25)

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