

APPENDIX 3

Archaeological Monitoring of Trial Holes

Results

TP01

Test Pit 01 measured 1.15m x 0.80m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.25m below ground level (bgl) at the southern end of the curvilinear section of Sprott Wall (here numbered 106) - at the junction with the northern wall (103) of the north range of the Canterbury Quad.

Natural gravel (100) was encountered at 0.86m bgl and was overlain by a reddish brown silty clay deposit (101) which was between 0.22m and 0.54m thick. This is likely to have pre-dated the construction of Wall 103, although no obvious construction cut was apparent within the confines of the test pit (an arbitrary cut number (105) was assigned) - the base of Wall 103 was revealed at 0.97m bgl. Deposit 101 and the stepped footing of Wall 103 were overlain by a homogeneous mid greyish brown silty clay with 10-15% gravel fragments (102). As with Wall 103, no obvious construction cut was discernible for the stepped element of Sprott Wall (106), although the irregular nature of the face suggested that it was likely to have been below ground and was probably trench built through Deposit 102 (cut number 106). Wall 106 clearly abutted Wall 103. Deposit 102 and the step of wall 106 were overlain by 0.20m of modern topsoil. A modern service trench was apparent in the east facing section of the test pit.

TP02

Test Pit 02 measured 1m x 0.6m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.18m toward the southern end of the straight section of Sprott Wall.

A compact reddish brown silty clay deposit (200) at least 0.30m thick was encountered at 0.90m bgl and was likely to have been cut by a trench (201) for the construction of the stepped footing of the wall (202), the top of which was revealed at 1.08m bgl – the step at this location appeared to be just one course thick, although this was not established with any degree of certainty. As with TP01, the construction cut was barely discernible and only apparent in the slightly more mixed composition of the material overlying the step in comparison to Deposit 200 to the west. Deposit 200 was overlain by a homogeneous mid reddish grey clay silt with 10% gravel fragments (201) which was 0.52m thick and was in turn overlain by 0.38m of topsoil.

TP03

Test pit 03 measured 1.15m x 0.92m and was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.50m to the south of the gate between the President's Garden and the Fellows Garden.

The earliest deposit encountered was a compacted mid greyish brown clay silt with limestone flecks and gravel fragments throughout (300), the extent of this deposit was unclear within the confines of the test pit, and it is possible that it was a localised variation in the composition and compaction of an otherwise homogeneous mid brownish grey silty clay deposit (301) which appeared to have been truncated by the construction cut (302) for the stepped footing of Sprott Wall (304) – the base of which was revealed at 1.48m bgl. Deposit 301 was at least 0.80m thick, and across the majority of the trench it was overlain by a 0.38m thick layer of mid greenish grey silty clay (303). This was not apparent in the north facing section and consequently is likely to have been filling a negative feature. Deposit 303 was overlain by 0.28m of topsoil.

TP04

Test Pit 04 was excavated to the north of the gate between the President's Garden and the Fellows Garden, and measured 1.40m x 0.90m.

The maximum depth of the test pit was 0.90m, although natural gravel (400) was encountered at 0.50m below ground level. The gravel had been cut by a 0.3m deep feature (401) filled by a mid-dark reddish brown silty clay (405). The fill had been truncated by the construction cut for the footing of Sprott Wall which did not step out in this location – the base of the footing was revealed at 0.80m bgl. Fill 405 was overlain by a mid-greyish brown silty clay with 5-10% gravel fragments (406), which was 0.34m thick and appeared to have been cut by a second feature (402). Feature 402 had a primary fill comprising mid-dark grey silt-clay (403) and an upper fill of mid-pale greenish grey silty clay (404). Deposit 406 and Fill 404 were overlain by 0.17m of topsoil.

TP05

Test Pit 05 was excavated to the north of Test Pit 03 and measured 1.15m x 0.94m. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.30m bgl through a largely homogeneous mid brownish grey silty clay (500). Although no construction cut was discernible, it is likely that this deposit pre-dated the construction of the stepped footing of Sprott Wall (502) – the base of which was not revealed within the trench. The top of the step was encountered at 1.02m bgl but stepped back in by c0.04m below the first course of the step.

Deposit 500 had been truncated by a feature (503) measuring at least 1.10m x 0.90m. This was filled by a mid-greenish grey silty clay (504) which was overlain by a 0.10m thick lens of mortar and fragments of ceramic building material (CBM). The eastern edge of Feature 503 and eastern extent of Deposit 505 appeared to respect Footing 502 and therefore are likely to post-date its construction. Deposits 500, 504 and 505 were overlain by 0.35m of topsoil.

Interpretation

Given the limited nature of the investigation and the lack of artefactual evidence recovered from the deposits encountered, the following interpretations are necessarily tentative.

Although no absolute datum levels were acquired during the watching brief, the comparative height of the top of each test pit indicated that the ground level at the top of Test Pits 03, 04 and 05 was relatively level, whereas that at the top of Test Pits 02 and 01 were 0.20m and 0.43m higher respectively - suggesting a gradual rise at the southern end of the President's Garden. Consequently, if the level at the top of 02, 03 and 04 is considered as OA1 then the elevation of the top of the gravel seen in Test Pits 01 and 04 was similar (0.5m below OA1 and 0.43m below OA1 respectively).

The second gravel terrace upon which central Oxford is located is overlain by a post-glacial loessic subsoil, the composition of which is invariably a mid-reddish brown silty clay. Deposits 101, 200 and 405 are likely to originate from this subsoil, although the undulating interface between Deposit 101 and the underlying gravel (100) suggested that the deposit was filling a negative feature(s) implying that the gravel has been truncated at this point and that the Deposit 101 represented a re-deposition of the loess - which is also clearly the case with the similarly composed deposit in TP04 (405). It was unclear whether Deposit 200 was in-situ loess or a re-deposition of same, although the fact that the top of this deposit was 0.70m below OA1 would indicate that the latter is more likely as the gravel was observed approximately 0.20m higher to the south and north (TPs01 and 04 respectively). Although no dating evidence was recovered, it is not unusual for early features from pre-history to the Late-Saxon foundation of the *burh* to be filled by re-deposited material originating from this subsoil.

Similarly, the deposits at the bottom of the excavated sequence in Test Pits 03 and 05 are also likely to be filling negative features given that the bases of these test pits were 1.5m and 1.3m below OA1 respectively. In the majority of the test pits, the horizon from which these putative features were cut was overlain by a homogeneous layer of silty clay (102, 203, 406) which is loosely interpreted as an imported garden soil (this horizon was not discernible in TP05 and had been truncated in TP03). However, the elevation of the interface between this deposit and the underlying “fills” varied from c0.70m below OA1 (TP02) to 0.25m below OA1 (TP01) which may indicate a degree of landscaping prior to the deposition of this material.

The construction horizon for Sprott Wall was unclear given the lack of any discernible construction cut, although it clearly abutted the northern wall of the north range of the Canterbury Quad. In TPs 01 and 04 the lack of visible cut may be a result of the footing being trench built, but the fact it stepped out in the remainder of

the test pits would imply that a construction cut should have been visible. That it was not may simply be a result of the homogeneous composition of many of the deposits encountered.

The reason for the variation in the profile and depth of the footing may be a result of the earlier negative features described above. It is possible that the increased depth and stepping of the footing in TPs 02, 03 and 05 is as a result of concerns during the construction of the wall with regard to soft spots created by the fills of these features - whereas the footings remain shallower and un-stepped where they are constructed directly off the relatively stable terrace gravel.

The function of the localised deposits of greenish grey clay (303, 404 and 504) is also unclear, although they certainly appeared to be filling features cut through the “imported garden soil”, and there was some indication within TP05 that Deposit 504 post-dated Sprott Wall. It is possible that these relate to the use of the area immediately adjacent to this section of the wall as a border, and that they represent clay filled planting pits.