

16 St Giles's, Oxford. Watching Brief Report Archaeological Watching Brief Report

May 2020

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16 St Giles's, Oxford. Watching Brief Report
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16 St Giles's, Oxford

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

Written by Paul Murray.

With contributions from John Cotter and illustrations by Mathew Bradley and Magda Wachnik.

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Summary

Between September 2019 and April 2020 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Gray, Baynes and Shew to undertake a watching brief at 16 St Giles's, Oxford. The works involved the archaeological monitoring of the refit/repair of timber and stone flooring within the basement and the excavation for a lift-pit to the rear of the property.

The watching brief recorded a medieval domestic refuse pit during excavation for the lift-pit to the rear of the property. Medieval refuse pits were typically located within the back gardens of tenements, and as such, provides evidence for the urban development of St Giles's. An ash and cinder deposit, possibly representing the remains of an earlier floor, was recorded within the basement, although only survived in small patches and did not produce any finds.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Gray, Baynes and Shew for commissioning this project. Thanks, are also extended to David Radford who monitored the work on behalf of Oxford City Council.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Richard Brown. Adam Fellingham and James Mumford directed the fieldwork. Digitizing was carried out by Mathew Bradley and Magda Wachnik. Thanks, is also extended to the teams of OA staff that cleaned and packaged the finds under the management of Leigh Allen and prepared the archive under the management of Nicola Scott.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Gray, Baynes and Shew to undertake a watching brief at 16 St Giles's, Oxford where internal and external alterations and refurbishment works are being carried out.
- 1.1.2 16 St Giles's is a Grade II listed building formerly known as the Judge's House (listing ref: 1047136) and is located within an area of archaeological potential (see Section 2). The work is subject to planning approval (18/02067/FUL).
- 1.1.3 Correspondence with David Radford, Oxford City Council Archaeological Planning Advisor, established the requirement for an archaeological monitoring during intrusive works. A written scheme of investigation was produced by OA detailing the Local Authority's requirements for work necessary to discharge the planning conditions. This document outlines how OA implemented the specified requirements.
- 1.1.4 The work is also subject to Listed Building Consent (18/02068/LBC); specifically, 'Condition 10', requiring historic building recording. This has been conducted as a separate phase of work and a report is forthcoming.
- 1.1.5 All work was undertaken in accordance with local and national planning policies.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The Site is a Grade II listed building on the eastern side of St Giles's (SP 5120 0681), (Fig. 1). The house is bounded to the north, south and east by similar substantial (and listed) domestic properties, dating from the 18th-19th centuries.
- 1.2.2 The Site is located on Summertown-Radley Sand and Gravel deposits. These are superficial deposits formed up to 2 million years ago in the Quaternary Period (Geological Survey of England and Wales, sheet 236). This gravel forms a spur that runs between the River Thames to the west and River Cherwell to the east.

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 No 16 St Giles (formerly known as The Judge's Lodging, now part of St John's College) was built in 1702 with subsequent 18th-19th century alterations.

Prehistoric

1.3.2 The Site is located on a gravel spur between the Rivers Thames and Cherwell. This geological location is of interest throughout the prehistoric periods. The gravel terraces contain isolated finds of rolled artefacts of the Palaeolithic period. Later prehistoric periods are also represented on gravel terraces throughout Oxfordshire, in particular, the Bronze Age. The concentration of archaeology on the gravel terraces has been studied in detail and suggests limited but significant clusters of archaeology, in particular Bronze Age barrow cemeteries (Dodd 2003, 4). The Site is therefore believed to be located on a geological layer which possibly has a higher potential to

contain significant early archaeological artefacts and features than other geological formations.

- 1.3.3 In the vicinity of the Site, excavations have shown that the gravel spur upon which the Site is located was used extensively in the later prehistoric period for ritual and burial purposes. Three ring ditches dating from the Bronze Age (2500BC 700BC) were recorded by an evaluation at the former site of the Radcliffe Hospital 350 metres to the north west of the Site. Further ring ditches were recorded from the air and by geophysical surveys at University Parks c 550 m east of the Site. Works undertaken prior to the construction of the Sackler Library c 250 m to the south west of the Site identified two large Bronze Age ring ditches, interpreted as burial mound ditches.
- 1.3.4 To the north east, a Neolithic henge monument was uncovered during excavations at Kendrew Quadrangle, St. John's College in 2008 (TVAS 2014). A 200 m long section of the henge ditch was exposed prior to redevelopment work within the college. This ditch was 8 m wide and between 2.5 and 2.9 m in depth and was estimated to enclose an area c 150 m in diameter (see Figure 4). The ditch was dated to c 2200BC. A bank was assumed to have accompanied the ditch as was the case with other Henge monuments. A buried turf layer and antler picks were identified within the ditch fill. The site also had evidence of some limited Iron Age activity.

Romano-British Period (AD 43-410)

- 1.3.5 It appears that occupation of the gravel spur continued into the Roman period with Roman settlement evidence identified during the excavations at The Parks c 500 m to the east of the Site.
- 1.3.6 Roman pottery sherds were recovered during excavations at Keble College in 1971. Little other evidence has been found in the vicinity of the Site of this date, suggesting that levels of occupation during the Roman period were low.

The Early Medieval Period (AD 410-1066)

- 1.3.7 The site is located on the eastern side of St. Giles, the main road leading into the Anglo-Saxon burh of Oxford. The Site lay outside the Anglo-Saxon town of Oxford, to the north of what is regarded as the 11th-century extension of the town. However, there is sufficient evidence available to suggest an Anglo-Saxon presence to the north-east of the medieval town (Dodd 2003, 12).
- 1.3.8 It is known that there was some activity at this time around the site of the Neolithic henge immediately to the north of the Site, perhaps attracted by the presence of the former prehistoric field monuments, which were often revisited in the early medieval period.
- 1.3.9 The excavations at Kendrew Quadrangle in St. John's College which found the section of Henge monument ditch (see above) also uncovered a mass grave of some 34 individuals (TVAS 2014). This grave, which lay just immediately to the north east of the Site, was interpreted as a hurried burial of victims following a pogrom of Danes ordered by King Aethelred on St Brice's day in 1002. Many of the bodies showed signs of having sustained wounds, while some appeared to have been partially burnt. The early 11th-century date for the burials was backed up by radiocarbon analysis. It seems



likely that the henge ditch and possibly the bank that would have accompanied it would still have been visible as surface features at this time. As a result of this it seems likely that such a site, outside the existing town, would have made a good location for such a mass burial site.

The Later Medieval Period (AD 1066-1550)

- 1.3.10 The Site is located c 440 m to the north of the former medieval walled City of Oxford and The Site itself is located to the north east of St Giles where suburban occupation developed along this broad approach to Oxford (Dodd 2003). St Giles was fully builtup by the time of the Hundred Rolls survey of 1279 (ibid.) but there is little archaeological evidence to suggest how and when the northern suburb developed. Excavations on the site of the Ashmolean Museum to the south west of the Site recorded evidence for rubbish disposal, apparently to the rear of tenements facing onto the west side of St Giles. A series of investigations carried out within St John's College precincts provide similar 12th-14th century evidence (OA 2017).
- 1.3.11 The earliest map of the Site (Agas 1578) shows development of the area as it may have looked in the medieval period and appears to show the Site as undeveloped. Loggan's map (1675) shows the site within a series of tenements fronting St Giles with extended rear garden plots.



2 WATCHING BRIEF AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 The project aims and objectives were as follows:
 - i. To determine or confirm the absence/presence of any archaeological remains present that are likely to be impacted by the works.
 - ii. To inform the contractor, the client, and the OCC Planning Archaeologist of the presence of archaeological remains.
 - iii. To facilitate mitigation of any archaeological remains present either through preservation in situ or preservation by record (excavation and recording of archaeological remains prior to impact by the works).
 - iv. Excavation would seek to:
 - determine or confirm the character and approximate date or date range of any remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence.
 - provide additional information on the nature of the prehistoric and medieval resource in the locality.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 All intrusive works with the potential to reveal or disturb archaeological remains were monitored by an archaeological supervisor. This included Refit/repair of timber and stone flooring to rooms N-G8, N-G6 and N-G5, and the excavation for a lift-pit to the rear of the property (Fig.2).



3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the watching brief are presented below and include a stratigraphic description of the archaeological remains. The full details of the assigned context numbers with dimensions and depths can be found in Appendix A. Finds data and spot dates are tabulated in Appendix B.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 Ground conditions throughout the watching brief were generally good, and the site remained dry throughout. Archaeological features, where present, were easy to identify against the underlying geology.

3.3 General distribution of archaeological deposits

3.3.1 An archaeological feature was recorded within a pit excavated to accommodate a new access lift to the rear of the building (Fig. 2). No archaeological features were recorded during the internal basement works.

3.4 Lift Pit

- 3.4.1 A lift-pit excavated to the rear of the property (Figs. 2, 3), measuring 2m x 2.5m and 1.3m in depth was recorded (Fig. 3, Plate. 1).
- 3.4.2 The geological horizon (6) was established at a depth of 1.2m below the ground level. This was overlain by a thin layer (0.1m) comprising loose, mid yellow brown silty sand (5). Layer 5 was truncated by a partially exposed pit (7), (Plate. 1). The exposed dimensions of the pit were 1.6m (E-W) x 1.3m (N-S). Enough of the pit was exposed to estimate that the pits diameter would be *c*. 1.8m. It was filled by a firm, mid reddishbrown clayey silt (8). Pottery was recovered from the surface of this feature.
- 3.4.3 The pit was overlain by 0.5m of buried garden soil (4) comprising mid, greyish brown clayey silt with rare charcoal flecks and degraded shell. Pottery and ceramic building material were recovered from this deposit.
- 3.4.4 The garden soil was overlain by a thin (0.01m) layer of light yellowish mortar (3), possibly associated with the construction of the building. This was overlain by a moderately compact, light yellow-brown clayey silt (2) with frequent small limestone fragments and mortar, 0.3m thick, which produced Pottery and ceramic building material. This deposit formed a bedding layer for stone steps which were removed to accommodate the current works.
- 3.4.5 A levelling layer and the current stone floor overlaid deposit 2, which was 0.2m thick.

3.5 Basement works

3.5.1 Removal of timber and stone flooring (Rooms N-G8, N-G6 and N-G5 (Fig.2) within the basement revealed a geological horizon (Plate. 2) comprising mid yellow sandy gravel (6), at an estimated 2.8m below ground level. The geological horizon was overlain by a thin (c. 0.01m - 0.02m) layer comprising light grey ash and black cinder, which survived in patches. This may have represented a bedding layer for an earlier floor or



an accumulated deposit over an earth floor. In turn, this was overlain by a thin (0.01m - 0.02m) bedding layer for the current stone floor, comprising light brown sandy mortar.

3.6 Finds summary

3.6.1 Medieval domestic wares were recovered from the surface of Pit 7. Ceramic building material dated between the 15th – 17th centuries was recovered from a buried garden soil (4) and a rubble layer (2). A bedding layer (1) for the current external surface produced two fragments of clay tobacco pipe (1690-1720) and a fragment of glass (17th – 19th centuries).



4 **DISCUSSION**

4.1 Reliability of field investigation

- 4.1.1 The watching brief of the lift-pit was undertaken during fair weather conditions, with no flooding, and the feature was well defined against the underlying geology. Sufficient lighting was provided, and the geological horizon was clearly established within the basement to be confident that any features present would have been easy to identify.
- 4.1.2 It should be noted, that due to the depth of the lift-pit, the feature recorded could not be excavated and a full interpretation of its form and function is not possible. However, the recovered of pottery from the surface of the pit provides suitable dating evidence and indication of use.

4.2 Watching Brief objectives and results

- 4.2.1 The locations, extent, date and character of any archaeological remains were established, and their relative depths recorded.
- 4.2.2 Monitoring of works only identified a single archaeological feature.
- 4.2.3 A medieval domestic refuse pit (Plate. 1) containing medieval domestic wares, dated *c.* 1075-1250, was recorded during excavation of the lift pit. The pit was overlain by a layer of garden soil which produced pottery and ceramic building material (CBM), dated 1500-1625 and 15th-early 17th centuries respectively. A layer of construction debris was recorded overlying the garden soils, directly beneath the current stone surface, produced pottery dated *c.* 1650-1725, and CBM dated to the 16th-17th centuries.
- 4.2.4 Medieval refuse pits were typically located within the back gardens of tenements, and as such, may provide evidence for the urban development of St Giles's. The earliest map of the Site (Agas 1578) shows development of the area as it may have looked in the medieval period with the Site within a series of tenements fronting St Giles with extended rear garden plots.
- 4.2.5 Monitoring of the basement works recorded a thin, light grey layer comprising ash and cinder, surviving in poorly defined patches. This deposit possibly represented evidence either for the use of the basement as a store, or it may have been a bedding layer for an earlier floor.



APPENDIX A DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context Table						
Context No.	Туре	Width (m)	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1	Layer	-	0.2	Floor slab and make up layer	Glass. Clay pipe	17 th -19 th C
2	Layer	-	0.3	Construction deposit	Pottery, CBM	16 th -17 th C
3	Layer	-	0.1	Deposit of mortar	-	-
4	Layer	-	0.5	Buried soil horizon	Pottery, CBM	17 th C
5	Layer	-	0.1	Disturbed geological horizon	-	-
6	Layer	-	-	Geology-sandy gravel	-	-
7	Cut	1.6	-	Pit	-	-
8	Fill	1.6	-	Fill of 7	Pottery	1075- 1250



APPENDIX B FINDS REPORTS

B.1 Post-Roman Pottery

By John Cotter

Introduction

B.1.1 A total of 8 sherds of pottery weighing 348g were recovered from three contexts. Given the small quantity present, this has not been separately catalogued but is fully described below. Medieval fabric codes referred to are those of the Oxfordshire type series (Mellor 1994), whereas post-medieval fabric codes are those of the Museum of London (MoLA 2014).

Description

B.1.2 **Context (2) Spot-date: c 1650-1725**. Description: 3 sherds (weight 278g). Fresh joining sherds from a single Wessex-type bottle (Fabric WBOT). These comprise a complete flat base and the lower half of a bottle-shaped vessel in a fine sandy cream fabric with reduced greybrown surface patches externally.

B.1.3 **Context (4) Spot-date: c 1500-1625?** Description: 2 sherds (weight 28g). 1x body sherd from a small globular cup or jug in a fairly fine sandy red fabric with a dark brown glaze on both sides. The latter is possibly a slightly coarser example of Cistercian-type ware (CSTN, c 1480-1700), or an early example of post-medieval red earthenware (PMR, c 1550-1900), but a Tudor date seems likely in either case. 1x fresh body sherd from a small globular pipkin (cooking pot) in late medieval Brill/Boarstall ware (OXBX, c 1400-1625).

B.1.4 **Context (8) Spot-date: c 1075-1250**. Description: 3 sherds (weight 42g). All fresh body sherds from three separate vessels in Medieval Oxford ware (OXY). These comprise two sherds from yellow-glazed jugs or pitchers and a sherd from an unglazed cooking pot.

Discussion

B.1.5 The pottery comprises ordinary domestic medieval and post-medieval wares typical of the Oxford area. The sherds are generally in a good condition, though fragmentary.

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

B.1.6 The pottery here has some potential to inform research through re-analysis - particularly when reviewed alongside other assemblages from the same general area. It is therefore recommended that the pottery be retained.

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B.2 Ceramic Building Material (CBM)

By John Cotter

Introduction

B.2.1 Four pieces of CBM weighing 282g were recovered from two contexts. These have not been separately catalogued but are fully described below.

B.2.2 **Context (2) Spot-date: 16th to 17th century?** Description: 1 piece (20g). Edge fragment probably from a peg tile in a sandy light orange fabric.

B.2.3 **Context (4) Spot-date: 15th to early 17th century.** Description: 3 pieces (262g). All fairly fresh and crudely made; all in light orange-brown sandy fabric similar to the late medieval 'St Giles-type' fabric found in Oxford. 1x thick edge fragment possibly from a ridge tile or a thick peg tile. 2x edge fragments probably from peg tiles.

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

B.2.4 The CBM has little potential for further research. As it has been adequately recorded it could be discarded, if so desired.

B.3 Clay Tobacco Pipe

By John Cotter

Description

B.3.1 Two pieces of clay pipe weighing 22g were recovered from a single context. Given the small amount these have not been separately catalogued but are fully described below. Pipe bowl forms are referred to the local Oxford typology (Oswald 1984).

B.3.2 **Context (1) Spot-date: c 1690-1720.** Description: 2 pieces (weight 22g). 1x fresh bowl profile of Oxford Type C (c 1690-1720) with 60mm of stem attached. 1x fresh 17th-century stem fragment.

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

B.3.3 The pipes here are really only of use for dating and have little potential for further analysis. As they have been adequately recorded, they could be discarded if so desired.



B.4 Glass

By John Cotter

Description

B.4.1 A single piece of glass weighing 10g was. Given the small amount this has not been separately catalogued but is fully described below.

B.4.2 **Context (1) Spot-date: 17th to 19th century**. Description: 1 piece (10g). Curved piece of green bottle glass, possibly from the base (prunt area) of a wine bottle?

Recommendations regarding the conservation, discard and retention of material

B.4.3 The glass has little or no potential for further analysis and could be discarded, if so desired.

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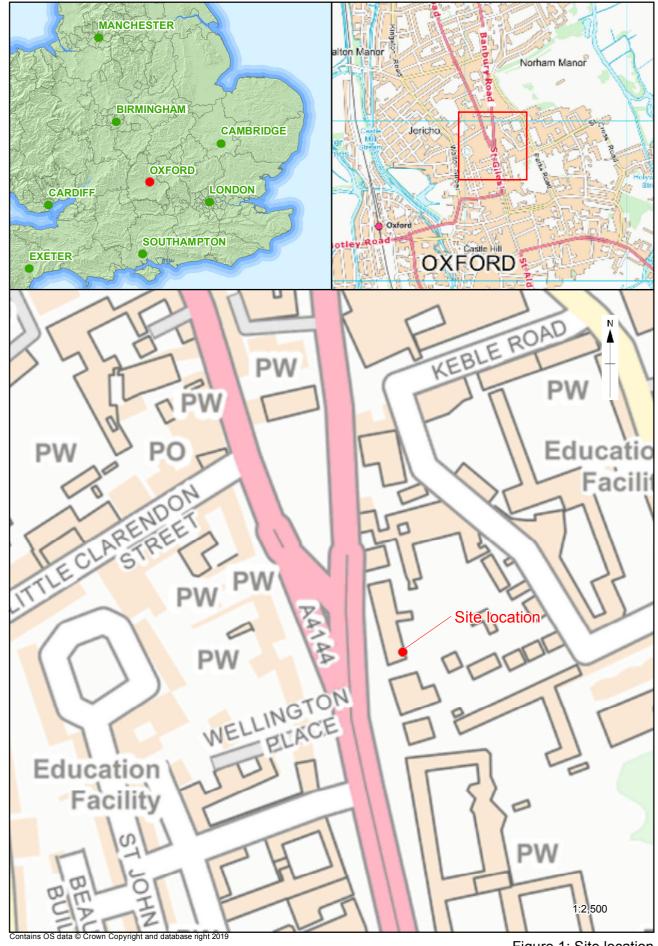
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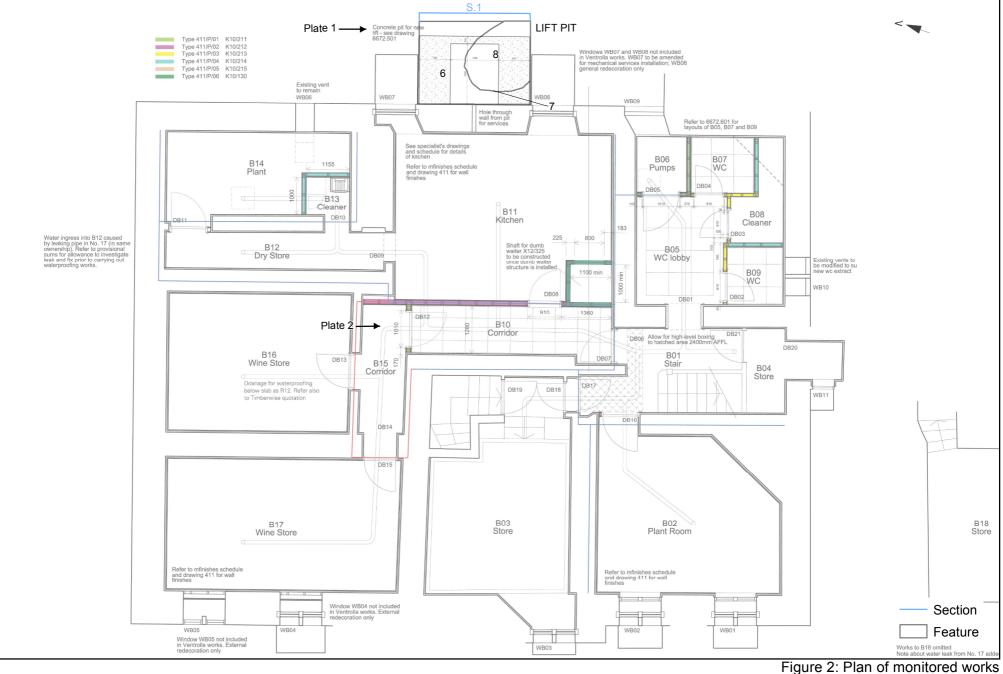
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APPENDIX D	SITE SUMMARY DETAILS / OASIS REPORT FORM
Site name:	16 St Giles's Oxford
Site code:	OXJOSG19
Grid Reference	OXSGSGWB
Туре:	Watching Brief
Date and duration:	2 days. 13/9/19 and 21-22/4/20
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at OA and will be deposited with Oxford County Museum Service in due course, under the following accession number: OXCMS:2019.113
Summary of Results:	A medieval pit, dated 11 th – 13 th centuries, was recorded within a lift-pit.





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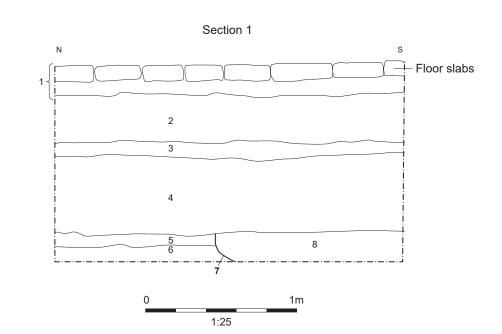




Plate 1: General shot of lift-pit showing Pit 7

Plate 2: General shot of basement works









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