

# New Staircase Pembroke College Oxford



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



August 2006

**Client: Carter Jonas LLP**

Issue N<sup>o</sup>: 1  
OA Job N<sup>o</sup>: 3334  
NGR: SP 5128 0600

**Client Name:** Carter Jonas LLP

**Client Ref No:**

**Document Title:** New Staircase, Pembroke College, Oxford

**Document Type:** Watching Brief

**Issue Number:** 1

National Grid Reference: SP 5128 0600  
Planning Reference:

OA Job Number: 3334  
Site Code: OXPEMS 06  
Invoice Code: OXPEMSWB  
Receiving Museum: Oxfordshire County Museums Service  
Museum Accession No: tbc

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Date: 11th August 2006

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Date: 21st August 2006

Document File Location H:\PROJECTS\Oxfordshire OX\Oxford City  
OC\Pembroke College\wbREP.doc

Graphics File Location severgo/i to q/OXPEMS06/OXPEMSWB\Pembroke  
College\AH\18.08.06

Illustrated by Amy Tiffany Hemingway

Signed.....

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## SUMMARY

*On August 9th 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief at Pembroke College Oxford (NGR: SP 5128 0600). The work was commissioned by Carter Jonas LLP in advance of work on a new steps. The watching brief revealed 19th century construction debris overlying a buried soil horizon. No evidence for Beef Lane, known to lie within the development area, was observed.*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Scope of work

- 1.1.1 On August 9th 2006 Oxford Archaeology (OA) carried out an archaeological watching brief during work on a new staircase at Pembroke College, Oxford (NGR: SP 5128 0600). The work was commissioned by Jonas Carter LLP in respect of the construction of a new flight of steps leading to an existing staircase.
- 1.1.2 A project design was agreed with Brian Durham, the City Archaeologist detailing how OA would meet the requirements of the brief.

#### 1.2 Location, geology and topography

- 1.2.1 The site is situated within the grounds of Pembroke College, located to the south of Oxford city centre (Fig. 1). The site lies at the base of an existing flight of steps leading down onto a stone slab roadway, Beef Lane, at approximately 61 m above OD.
- 1.2.2 The site is located on the southern edge of the 2nd River Gravel Terrace and the underlying geology is Oxford Clay (Geological Survey of Great Britain, sheet no 236).

#### 1.3 Archaeological and historical background

- 1.3.1 A desktop assessment detailing the archaeological background to the area had been previously prepared for an adjacent site (OA, 2006), and an abridged and modified digest is presented below.

##### *The Early Medieval Period*

- 1.3.2 The town of Oxford is believed to have its origins in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century about the time that St Frideswide's Priory was founded on the site of Christ Church. The city was certainly developed as a fortified *Burh* in the reign of King Alfred or his son Edward the Elder. By the 10<sup>th</sup> century a network of streets had been established and a defensive circuit constructed. Although the exact line of this defensive circuit along the southern side of Oxford is uncertain, it is likely that it is preserved in the line of the later medieval wall that survives on the north side of Brewer Street, south of Pembroke College. Wherever the early medieval rampart has been observed it has

been on or close to the line of the later medieval wall, although the rampart is not always present and has only been certainly identified along the northern and eastern sides of the town. Observations along the southern circuit are less certain, a possible section of turf rampart has been observed in the grounds of Pembroke college immediately to the north of the later medieval town wall, and interpreted as forming part of the early medieval defences. However, excavations to the south-west of the Site in Littlegate Street demonstrated that the later medieval defences were built on an area of domestic occupation with no trace of an earlier defensive system. This may indicate that there was no southern rampart in the early medieval period, and that the water courses were considered sufficient defence.

- 1.3.3 The archaeological evidence from the study area shows that early medieval settlement was not confined to the area within the town wall. Evidence has been found either side of St Aldate's, about 200 m south east of the development area at 79 - 80 St Aldate's and the former site of Linacre college. Activity seems to have been centred around the river channels. Excavations at 89 St Aldates along the course of the Trill Mill stream recorded deposits up to 4 m in depth. These deposits are indicative of domestic and industrial waterside activity along the edge of the mill stream, of the sort known at Fishergate in York (pers. comm. Brian Durham). This suggests that similar activity may be present within the site along the course of the Trill Mill stream.

#### ***The Later Medieval Period***

- 1.3.4 A section of the City wall from the later medieval period runs along the north side of Brewer Street, south of the college. The medieval wall is conventionally dated to 1226 with the first murage grant (Hassel, Halpin and Mellor 1984). The nature of the later medieval defences to the north and east of the town are relatively well understood, both from the evidence of upstanding remains and early maps such as Agas which shows a bastioned circuit. There is less evidence for the defences to the south and west of the town, where only slight and much altered upstanding remains survive. The section of wall along the north side of Brewer Street is built of roughly coursed rubble, and in places supports the south range of Pembroke College. The eastern end has been mostly rebuilt, with only the lower courses surviving to approximately 1.8 m, to the west it is incorporated into the garden wall of Pembroke College and is pierced by two modern doorways.
- 1.3.5 Salter's Survey of Oxford (Salter 1969) based upon the medieval records shows that tenements were present on the site by 1279

#### ***The Post Medieval and Modern Periods***

- 1.3.6 The earliest map showing the development site is the Agas Map of 1587 which shows typical narrow medieval tenements fronting Brewer Street with garden plots behind leading up to Beef Hill Lane, the current development site.

1.3.7 Pembroke College itself was founded in 1624, however Hollar's map of 1643 doesn't show any real change to the tenements and boundaries within the area of the watching brief. Loggan's map of 1673 suggests that further buildings have been constructed fronting along the length of Beef Lane with both Taylors Map of Oxford in 1751 and Faders Map of Oxford in 1789 showing similar development. By the time of the 1st edition of the Ordnance Survey Map in 1870, Pembroke College has assumed most of its current plan and Beef Lane has been diverted.

## 2 PROJECT AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Aims

- 2.1.1 To identify and record the presence or absence, extent, condition, quality and date of archaeological remains in the areas affected by the development.
- 2.1.2 To preserve by record any archaeological deposits or features that may be disturbed or destroyed during the course of any intrusive groundwork.
- 2.1.3 To make available the results of the archaeological investigation.

### 2.2 Methodology

- 2.2.1 The watching brief was conducted as a single site visit during the scheduled ground work when the excavation of the footings for two side walls was monitored. These consisted of the removal of existing surfaces and the hand excavation of two parallel trenches.
- 2.2.2 A plan showing the extent of the excavations was maintained at a scale of 1:20 (Fig. 2) and any recorded sections were drawn at a scale of 1:20. All excavated features were photographed using colour slide and black and white print film. A general photographic record of the work was also made. Recording followed procedures detailed in the *OA Field Manual* (ed D Wilkinson, 1992).

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 Description of deposits

- 3.1.1 A layer of dark grey-brown silt loam (4) containing much charcoal flecking was encountered at a depth of 0.25 m below the current ground level (Fig. 3). This was overlaid by a 0.1 m deep layer of dark yellow-brown clay silt (3), which contained many fragments of brick as well as fragments of salt glazed pipe and a fragment of iron piping. Overlying this was a 0.05 m thick layer of gravel (2) on which the cement spots supporting the York stone slabs (1) had been laid.

### 3.2 Finds

- 3.2.1 All the finds recovered were fragmentary examples of 19th/early 20th century brick and other construction debris (Salt glazed pipe, iron pipe etc) of a similar date. These were evaluated on site but were not retained.

### 3.3 Palaeo-environmental remains

- 3.3.1 No deposits suitable for palaeo-environmental sampling were encountered during the course of the watching brief.

## 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1.1 The base of the excavations encountered an undated garden soil, probably associated with either the tenement gardens or college gardens shown on the earlier maps. This had been overlain by a layer of made ground, probably associated with the construction with the building immediately to the north. The use of cement spots to support the stone slabs suggests that they were laid relatively recently.
- 4.1.2 No evidence pertaining to Beef Lane, such as metalling or cobbling was observed during the course of the watching brief. The presence of the garden soil suggests that the site may be located just to the north of the probable alignment of the lane.



## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT INVENTORY

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i> Finds</i>	<i>Date</i>
1	Layer	0.1 m	-	Modern York stone slabs	-	C20th
2	Layer	0.05 m	-	Gravel, base for stone slabs	-	C20th
3	Layer	0.1 m	-	Made ground, construction debris	Brick, salt glazed pipe, iron pipe	C19th/ C20th
4	Layer	> 0.05 m	-	Garden soil	-	Earlier than C19th

## APPENDIX 2 BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES

IFA, 2001 *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs*

OA, 2006 *Brewer Street Development, Oxford :Archaeological Desktop Assessment*

OAU, 1992 *Field Manual (ed D Wilkinson)*

## APPENDIX 3 SUMMARY OF SITE DETAILS

**Site name:** New staircase, Pembroke College, Oxford

**Site code:** OXPEMS 06

**Grid reference:** SP 1206 5128

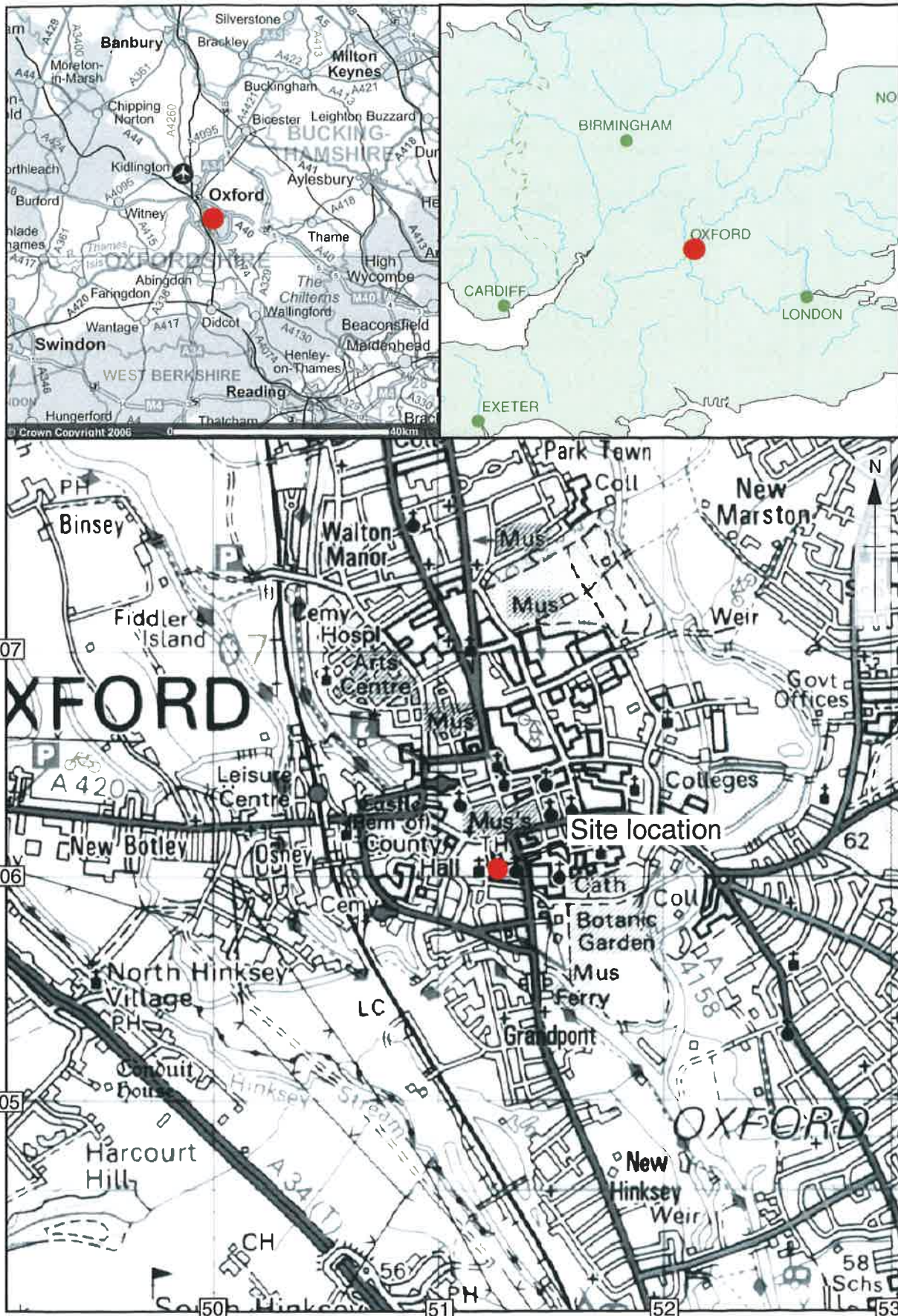
**Type of watching brief:** Hand excavation of two shallow foundation trenches

**Date and duration of project:** 09.08.06, 3.5 hours

**Area of site:** 15 m<sup>2</sup>

**Summary of results:** Earlier garden soil overlaid by 19th/20th century deposits

**Location of archive:** The archive is currently held at OA, Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES, and will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museums Service in due course.



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Figure 1: Site location



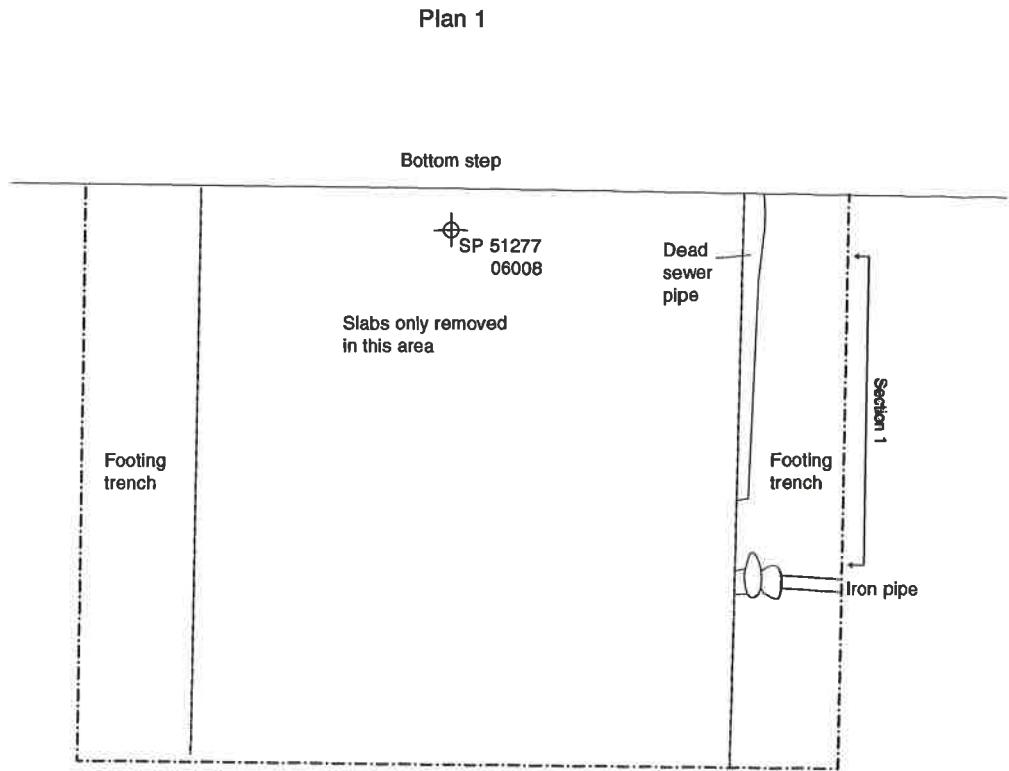


Figure 2 : Site plan

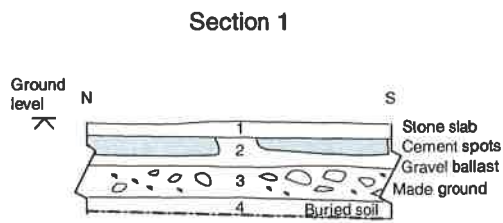


Figure 3 : Section



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