
STATEMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST NO 4

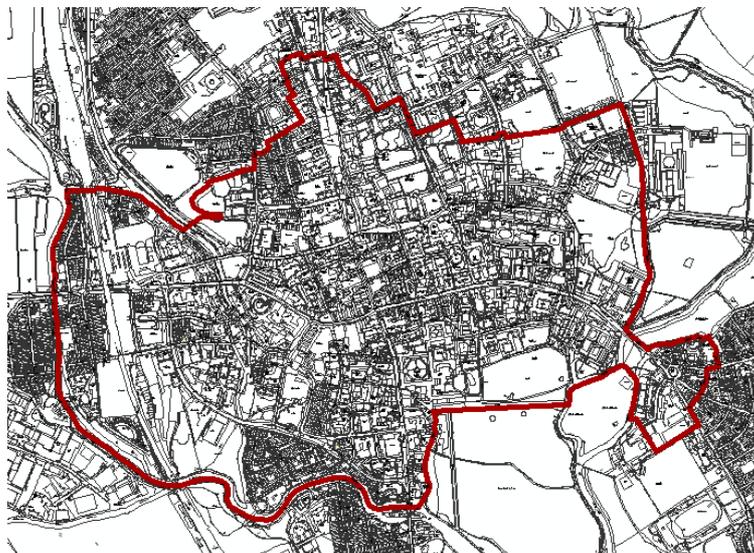
THE LATE SAXON AND MEDIEVAL TOWN

Asset/Monument Type: Late Saxon burh and medieval town

Summary: A middle Saxon crossing over the Thames floodplain may have developed into a trading settlement and Minster by the 8th century. A defended burh was established at Oxford by the early 10th century. The Late Saxon period saw the development of urban structural forms and the Norman Conquest brought initial destruction followed by economic growth fuelled by cloth, wool and investment in infrastructure such as the massive Grandpont stone causeway over the floodplain. In the 12th and 13th century Oxford enjoyed Royal Patronage but the economy faltered in the late 13th and early 14th centuries after which the University and associated colleges became increasingly dominant.

Location (NGR): SP5006

Version: 12/2/2012



The City Centre Archaeological Area

and the University and associated colleges became increasingly dominant.

Key characteristics

The following criteria (which are not in any order of ranking) are based on the Secretary of State's criteria for assessing Scheduled Monuments. They should not be regarded as definitive, but as an indicative provisional assessment.

1. **Period:** Does the asset characterise a category or historic period?

Assessment: The burh is first recorded in the Bural Hidage of 914-19 (although Oxford is mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle dating to 911-912. The origins of the burh remain unclear however a late 9th century date is likely. The settlement has an extended period of use is just are one of many asset types which characterise the medieval period.

Score: Medium

2. **Rarity:** What is the rarity of the asset in terms of regional and national context?

Assessment: Oxford is one of 33 burhs mentioned in the bural hidage and part of a subset that did not originate as Roman settlements, retains elements of planned layout and did subsequently obtain municipal status. In the 12th-13th century Oxford paid tallage contributions on cloth and wool which placed in within the wealthiest 12 towns in England in 1176-7 and the top three in 1227. In 1334 Oxford ranked 8th among English provincial towns in terms of taxable wealth, by 1523 it had fallen to 29th (VCH 1979). As a medieval University town with a system of wealthy academic colleges Oxford is only directly comparable to Cambridge.

Score: High

3. **Documentation:** *To what extent is the significance of the asset enhanced by existing documentation or lack thereof?*

Assessment: Oxford has exceptional collections of medieval documents relating to institutional landholdings (Munby in Dodd ed. 2003: 60) and an extensive body of published archaeological work.

Score: High

4. **Group Value:** *is the value of the asset enhanced by its association with related contemporary monuments or with monuments of different periods?*

Assessment: The Late Saxon Burh and medieval town have a large number of associations with peripheral and suburban settlement and institutions.

Score: High

5. **Survival/Condition:** *What is the estimated level of above and below ground survival?*

Assessment: There is considerable localised variation in terms of survival however a number of factors have combined to preserve extensive and important remains 1) the waterlogged conditions of the floodplain 2) the extensive college precincts which have protected remains from modern development 3) the survival of suburban deposits in areas of reclaimed floodplain where post medieval basementing has been absent or limited.

Score: High

6. **Fragility/Vulnerability:** *susceptibility to change*

Assessment: Urban environments are particularly susceptible to rapid change and development pressures.

Score: High vulnerability

7. **Diversity:** *Does the asset possess a combination of high quality features?*

Assessment: The city contains a number of exceptional assets including the Grandpont Norman Causeway, Late Saxon St Georges and St Michaels towers, Norman Motte and latter castle and well house. Norman vaults including that of the collegiate chapel of St George at the Castle. Late Saxon rampart and wall (largely buried but an exposed section of the Late Saxon wall is on display), 13th century stone walls including the country's only example of concentric defences used in municipal architecture. Other notable features included excavated evidence for Late Saxon manufacturing, cellar pit forms and mass grave. The town has extensive number of monumental buildings associated with the University and colleges.

Score: High

8. **Potential:** *Is there a likelihood that currently unrecorded evidence can be anticipated?*

Assessment: There is exceptional potential for as yet unrecorded evidence.

Score: High

Overall score (23/24)

Overall Assessment of Archaeological Interest: High

HERITAGE ASSET DESCRIPTION

Saxon

The Oxford Local Authority Area (LAA) forms parts of a wider landscape of early Saxon settlement along the Upper Thames and has significant potential to contribute to our understanding of this landscape, especially because of the capacity of both the floodplain and the stream valleys of the Corallian Ridge to preserve significant environmental remains from this period. The city is notable for its well-preserved deposits relating to the Mid-Late Saxon

crossing across the Thames floodplain at St Aldates and environmental remains in the city have rich potential to provide further information regarding the local economy, manufacturing, trade and patterns of consumption and diet. Oxford has considerable potential to contribute to our understanding of Late Saxon urban development and the foundation and evolution of defensive burhs, including the role of manorial holdings and minster foundations in this process. The Late Saxon town is notable for containing two distinctive and simultaneous traditions of pottery use in the 10th century which may have much to teach us about the cultural identity of the inhabitants. Furthermore there is good potential to further investigate aspects of Late Saxon town planning, tenement development, urban structures and the material culture of urban, suburban and hinterland zones. The city is also notable for its potential to contribute to the further study of early churches, early monastic institutions and burial grounds. Furthermore there is great potential to further study patterns of communication across, and utilisation of, the Thames and Cherwell rivers and related floodplains and islands, including long established traditions of grazing land and hay making.

Norman

Oxford has exceptional potential for the study of urban development during the Norman period, including the evolution of cellar pit construction from Late Saxon forms, tenement plot evolution, the development of stone houses and other architectural forms. Oxford is notable for the patterns of investment and patronage both in the urban area in the form of the nationally important Grandpont Causeway and Castle, but also for the Royal Palace at Beaumont Street, the collegiate Chapel of St George and early religious institutions. The Local Authority Area (LAA) also presents opportunities to further study the relationship between the town and its hinterland, especially patterns of hinterland investment in the form of hospitals, churches and other institutions. There is considerable scope for further waterlogged material from the Castle ditch, and also from floodplain channels and crossings, to contribute to our understanding of material culture and diet during this period.

Medieval

Oxford was a medieval town of national importance with particular significance for its role in the development of collegiate and university life in England. It is also exceptional in terms of the extent of its medieval documentation and the level of synthesis undertaken on this material. The archaeology of medieval Oxford has exceptional potential to provide further insights into patterns of urban change and the evolving relationship, and disparities of wealth and lifestyle, between 'town and gown', between college institutions and religious institutions. The city and its hinterland offer exceptional opportunities to further understand changing patterns of river management and communications along the Upper Thames; also developments in domestic, commercial and military activity and changing patterns of cultural identity, status and consumption. There is good potential for further well-preserved organic remains to survive in association with the Thames Crossing, floodplain channels and the Castle ditch.

Post-medieval

Investigations in Oxford have played an important role in the development of field of post-medieval archaeology and the city has notable potential for the further study of urban development and cultural change during this period. It presents exceptional potential to study the post-Reformation development of nationally important college and university institutions. The city is of interest for its pattern of late 16th century economic recovery and related patterns of migration, urban and hinterland settlement and evolving patterns of land-use and

vernacular architecture. The Local Authority Area also presents opportunities to study the development of communications and trade along the Upper Thames, stone quarrying, service industries and the early development of social and civic structures such as prisons, hospitals and workhouses. The study of human remains from this period offers good potential to further understand patterns of health, wealth and lifestyle within the local population. The city was also important as the Royalist capital during the Civil War and the character and scope of the Royalist defences and Parliamentary siege works remain to be determined. The city possesses exceptional levels of documentation for this period which further enhances the potential for archaeological study

Modern

The Early Modern period is a rapidly developing area of archaeological interest, presenting opportunities to examine the impact of globalisation, mass production, standardisation and industry on the lives of the people of Oxford. Oxford is notable for its location on important Thames Valley transportation routes and for its relatively late industrial development. The university and colleges remain important for their role in educating elites instrumental to processes of empire, government, industry and the church. In the 20th century Oxford developed a nationally important car industry, owned by William Morris, which transformed the hinterland of Oxford from a series of semi-rural villages providing labour for domestic and college service and market gardening to a suburban industrial landscape in east Oxford around the large Pressed Steel and Cowley works.

Bibliography

Munby, J, 2003 'Historical background' in Dodd, A (ed.) *Oxford Before the University*.
VCH 1979 A History of the County of Oxford, Volume 4, The City of Oxford (A, Crossley ed.),
The Victoria History of the Counties of England.