

## STATEMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST NO 15

### CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE

**Asset/Monument Type:** Academic College

**Summary:** Corpus Christi College was founded in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century on the site of the earlier Urban Hall. The college is located in the eastern sector of the city against the former line of the town wall. It originally comprised a single quadrangle on the Merton Street frontage later expanded to the south.

**Location (NGR):** SP51620601

**Definition:** A college is an establishment housing a community of secular clergy sharing a degree of common life less strictly controlled than that within a monastic order. Colleges are normally identified through documentary evidence. Their buildings are usually associated with a parish church (not necessarily of formal collegiate status) although some extra-parochial and academic colleges had their own chapel. Other morphological elements present may include one or more cloisters or quadrangles, ranges of lodgings (either communal or more commonly as separate apartments), a common hall or refectory, service buildings (kitchen, buttery etc), a master or warden's lodging, a guest house, gate houses and sometimes an associated school or bede-house.

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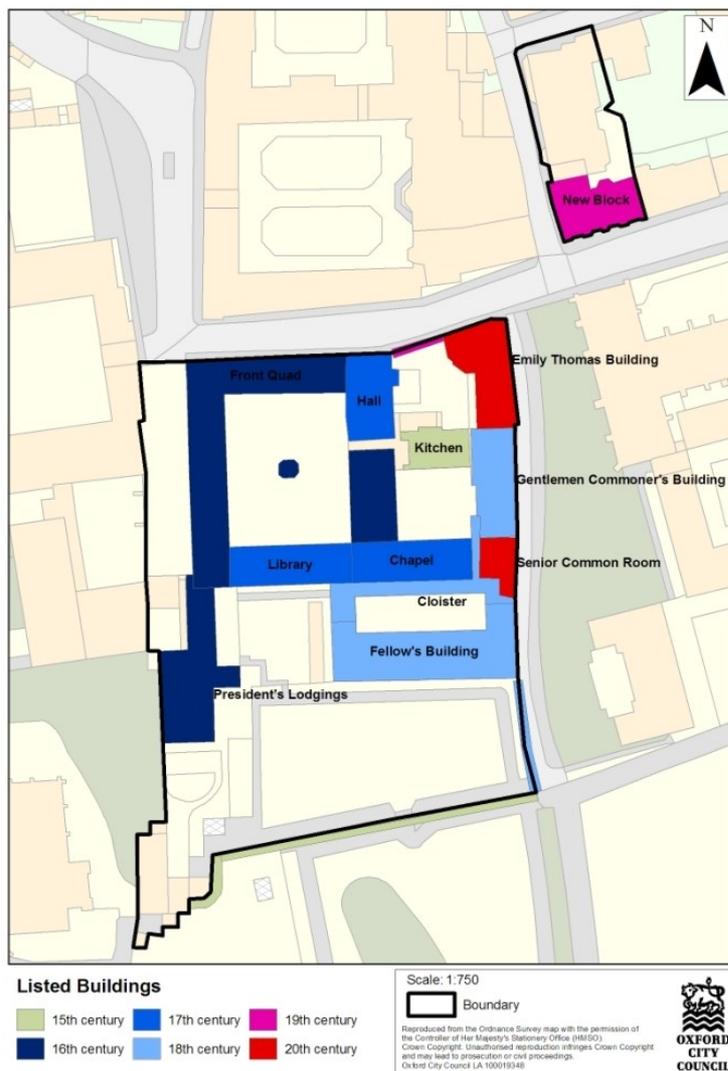
#### Key characteristics

*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 college is characteristic of a period of secular collegiate education from 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Academic colleges are just one of many asset types which characterise the medieval and post-medieval period.

**Score:** Medium



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

**Assessment:** At a national level the University of Oxford is an institution only directly comparable to the slightly later University of Cambridge. At a county level, 22 medieval academic and chantry colleges are recorded in the Oxfordshire OHER. Corpus Christi is one of 18 Oxford Colleges established by the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**Score:** High

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

**Assessment:** Several catalogues have been produced detailing the contents of the college library, manuscripts and archives. A significant body of archaeological documentation also exists, although this only relates to localised areas and does not provide a detailed deposit model for the site.

**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 College is spatially associated with the Saxon intramural and extramural settlement; medieval settlement, seven former Academic Halls, several Saxon streets and the medieval City Wall. Corpus Christi is one of 18 Oxford Colleges established by the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The college kitchen is one of a notably group of medieval kitchens to survive in Oxford.

**Score:** High

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

**Assessment:** Architecturally the buildings of Corpus Christi appear to maintain some degree of preservation however no comprehensive survey of the college has been undertaken since the 1939 RCHME survey. 20<sup>th</sup> century additions to the college are concentrated to the east. The Post-medieval college has not been subject to extensive excavation, however small scale works suggest the presence of well preserved and significant archaeological remains.

**Score:** Medium

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

**Assessment:** Vulnerable to small scale works and permitted development.

**Score:** Medium

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

**Assessment:** Corpus Christi College contains one regular Quad, two smaller quads, a Library, a Chapel, a Kitchen and a Hall. Several formal gardens were located to the rear of the Front Quad

**Score:** High

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

**Assessment:** Archaeological investigations within the college indicate a good level of preservation. At the Emily Thomas Building archaeological evidence dating to the 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century was recorded at a depth of 0.4 to 0.5m on the eastern side of the college while evidence of a comparable date from the Music Room were recorded at a depth at a similar depth

**Score:** High

Overall score (21/24)

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## Overall Assessment of Archaeological Interest: High

### HERITAGE ASSET DESCRIPTION

Corpus Christi is located in the south eastern sector of the town, the original line of the late Saxon defences may have continued through the centre of the college on a north south alignment towards St Frideswide's, with the eastern Saxon extension the entire college site was incorporated within the Saxon boundary and the wall defences from then on ran on an east west alignment south of the college. A number of early 14<sup>th</sup> century academic halls occupied the site of the later college fronting onto Oriel Street and Merton Street.

Corpus Christi College was founded in around 1517 by Bishop Fox, originally conceived as a monastic college it was eventually founded as a secular college for 40 fellows (Salter & Lobel: 1954, 219). The college is located on Merton Street and consists of only one full quadrangle. The earliest building is the 15<sup>th</sup> century Kitchen of the South-East Hall (LB Ref 9/464D). The Front Quad is primarily early 16<sup>th</sup> century in date (LB Ref 9/464A) with a 17<sup>th</sup> century East Range (LB Ref 9/464B) and south range comprising the library and college chapel (LB Ref 9/464H; J). The College also maintains a section of the City Wall and one of its bastions (LB Ref 9/464R).

Archaeological investigations have recorded remnants of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Canterbury College boundary wall along with the remains of an earlier road and medieval tenements predating the foundation of Corpus Christi (Sturdy 1961-62: 32). Possible evidence of the Saxon defensive ditch has also been recorded to the rear of the college (Hassall 1973: 274) and for the medieval wall (Durham 1982: 156). Archaeological investigations in 2000 at the Emily Thomas Building recorded several rubbish pits and a well containing fragments of 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century pottery and may relate to the former academic hall known to have existed on the site (Holmes, 2000,1). The presence of animal bone of both cattle and sheep along with environmental evidence from the well indicate the excavations were centred in a former farmyard or kitchen area (*ibid*: 3).

An excavation undertaken in 2008 on the site of the new college auditorium identified a phase of Late Saxon burials related to the nearby precinct of St Frideswide, a large ditch possibly defensive in character and evidence for industrial activity in the medieval period (tanning), also pit digging likely to be related to the foundation of the college and also elements of the 16<sup>th</sup> century garden layout (Bashford 2009 and forthcoming).

### Academic statements

#### MPP Class Description

'A sample of nationally important sites should include examples of early medieval establishments of secular priests (if a well-preserved site can be identified), a prebendal or portional college of the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century, later medieval chantry foundations of both high and low status in both urban and rural situations, and possibly several major academic colleges. This last type is of special importance in demonstrating the post-medieval continuity of a tradition restricted to a narrow social and economic context' (English Heritage 1989).

### Research agenda

#### Pre College Research Agenda:

- Can further evidence for the Late Saxon ditch be identified, what was its form and function?
- What was the extent of St Frideswides cemetery, what can surviving inhumations tell us about the date of the cemetery and the status, diet and health of the monks?

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- Can we further identify the character and extent of domestic and commercial activities in this area prior to the construction of the college?

The College Research Agenda:

- Desirability of integrated Conservation management plan including truncation and deposit potential map noted.
- A formal garden was present in the 16th century, does anything now survive?
- A detailed building survey of existing fabric may be productive.
- Establish the character and extent of surviving college era remains. What can they tell us about changing patterns of status, wealth, material culture and diet and for buried evidence for earlier structural remains.

### Associated Monuments

UAD Monument 2: Saxon defences (site of). Probable line of former burh defences

UAD Monument 4: City Wall (site of). Former line of City Wall through Corpus Christi

UAD Monument 109: Corpus Christi College. University College

UAD Monument 432: City Wall Bastion No 21.

UAD Monument 674: Corpus Christi College Gardens. Park.

UAD Monument 719: Merton Street. Late Saxon street surfaces recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

UAD Monument 722: Oriel Street. Medieval remains recorded, probably Late Saxon in origin.

UAD Monument 775: Medieval Settlement, Salter South East 3

UAD Monument 802: Late Saxon Settlement, South East Sector

UAD Monument 804: Late Saxon Settlement, Eastern Suburb

UAD Monument 814: Beke's Inn (site of). Former Academic Hall.

UAD Monument 834: Corner Hall (site of). Former Academic Hall.

UAD Monument 845: Goter Hall (site of). Former Academic Hall.

UAD Monument 864: Ledenporch (site of). Former Academic Hall.

UAD Monument 872: Neville's Inn (site of). Former Academic Hall.

UAD Monument 882: St Christopher Hall (site of). Former Academic Hall.

UAD Monument 911: Urban Hall (site of). Former Academic Hall.

### Associated Events

- *Observations c 1900 (UAD 1416)*: Hurst records that the grave of Bishop Fox was uncovered when rubbish behind the altar screen was cleared. Around the coffin were pieces of marble, parts of a carving of the Coronation of the Virgin.
- *Excavations, President's Lodging 1958 (UAD 186)*: The 14<sup>th</sup> century wall of Canterbury College was exposed. Below were remains of the earlier road and the early medieval houses which fronted it. In the occupation layers was 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century pottery.
- *Excavations, Front Quad 1972 (UAD 255)*: A modern brick barrel vaulted cellar or sump was found at the eastern end. Next to it was a large gully or ditch, filled with black mud and sealed with stones. The bottom of the ditch was 4 m below the surface and cut into loam, not gravel. This ditch could have been part of the 10<sup>th</sup> century defences.
- *Excavations, Bastion 21, 1981 (UAD 336)*: The Bastion was definitely medieval and may have been to defend a gate.
- *Watching Brief, Staircase 7, 1979 (UAD 541)*: The bottom fill of the existing cellar was clay. It was not certain whether this was natural or a fill of the Saxon Town Ditch, which would have existed in the vicinity. Below the current floor an earlier surface, consisting of worn

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marble sets sparsely set in mortar. A well was found under the S wall of the existing staircase. This was c0.8 m square with an ashlar top course above rough faced stone. It still had water in it.

- *Finds from Corpus Christi College in 1979 (UAD 544):* During refurbishment a cone of fabric was found behind 16<sup>th</sup> century panelling in the lower library. A possibly 19<sup>th</sup> century wire frame on a stick was found behind the lining of a cupboard in the passage between Front and Small Quads. It may have been used for dipping into a liquid. A book was also found.
- *Building Survey, College kitchen roof in 1981 (UAD 629):* Samples sent for dendro-chronology revealed that the oak was felled between 1500 and 1505, and then used within a year. The roof had four bays with four pairs of principal rafters. Each bay had six common rafters. All the timber were covered with a black pitchy deposit produced by smoke blackening. The dating shows it is unlikely that the kitchen formed part of the earlier Urban Hall.
- *Excavations, 1986 (UAD 1529):* No signs of metalling were seen on the original topsoil, but there may have been disturbance when a cellar was built.
- *Watching Brief College Garden in 1986 (UAD 584):* Partly robbed wall recorded overlain by surfaces containing 17<sup>th</sup> century pottery. About 10 m away was a very compacted cobble fill with medieval brick aligned NW-SE. 20 m from Merton Grove was a stone footing at right angles to the college range.
- *Watching Brief Emily Thomas Building, 2000 (UAD 421):* The area contained two rubbish pits and a well, dated from pottery to the 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. They may relate to Urban Hall which occupied the site before the college. Animal bone was found in one pit and plant remains recovered from the well. These finds suggest domestic activity or possibly a farmyard. The pits were truncated by a later cellar and foundations.
- *Evaluation, Music Room 2008 (UAD 1714):* A mortared stone structure, possibly representing the defensive line of the late Saxon burh was also revealed along with evidence for later development of the defensive circuit, including a localised re-build of the City Wall in the early 17th century. Evidence for the partial reconstruction of the boundary wall between Christ Church and Corpus Christi colleges was also revealed. The date of this re-build is unclear. Some evidence for 13th-14th century occupation was recovered from a pit. Two post-medieval cess pits (one stone lined, one not). Traces of earlier garden designs and robber trench from college wall also noted.

### **Architects:**

Front Quad: William Vertue, William Est (stone masons) 16<sup>th</sup> century

Sundial: Charles Turnball 1581

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