

Jesus College

New Basement Fire Escape, Third Quad, Jesus College,
Oxford.

NGR SP 5135 0634

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

Planning Ref. No. 99/757

Oxford Archaeological Unit

February 2000

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Date:

21/2/2000

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Summary

In October 1999 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief at Third Quad, Jesus College, Oxford (NGR SP 5135 0634). No archaeological features were seen and no finds were retrieved.

1 Introduction (Fig 1)

The development proposal (planning application no. 99/757) comprised the construction of a new fire escape from the Junior Common Room basement bar in Third Quad, Jesus College, Oxford. An archaeological watching brief was required as the site lies within an area of proven archaeological potential.

The watching brief was commissioned by the Architect's Design Partnership on behalf of Jesus College. It was undertaken to a brief set by and a WSI agreed with the Oxford Archaeological Advisory Service.

2 Background

The development site formerly was occupied by the New Inn Public House, and now is owned by Jesus College. Nos. 26-28 Cornmarket and St Michael's Chambers in Ship Street, formerly Zacharias', and recently restored by Jesus College between 1985 and 1987, were constructed around 1386 as the 'New Inn'. Much of the fabric of the medieval courtyard inn was demolished in the early part of this century, however a large number of drawings and photographs were made during this work and the nature of the standing building is fairly well understood.

During the restoration works an opportunity was afforded for some small-scale excavation and salvage recording of the buried archaeology. In all, nine trial trenches were dug. The general conclusion from the pre-inn deposits was that there was considerable activity on the site with pitting behind the Cornmarket frontage and possibly an independent building constructed along Ship Street with a floor level initially 1 m below present ground surface. None of this work shed any light on the rearward extent of the site. Jesus College's Third Quad is basemented, the construction of which was thought likely to have disturbed at least the deposits adjoining the study area. However, the location of the present excavation coincided with the likeliest area for a back (east) range to the inn courtyard.

3 Aims

The aims of the watching brief were to identify any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the works, and to record these to established OAU standards (Wilkinson 1992), in order to secure their preservation by record.

4 Methodology

The watching brief was maintained by means of separate inspection visits, undertaken by an archaeological supervisor; all excavation was undertaken by JCB mechanical excavator, supplemented by occasional hand-digging.

Within the constraints imposed by health and safety considerations the deposits exposed were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and monochrome print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets. Soil description utilises standard charts for the approximation of percentage of inclusion types in soil deposits.

5 Results

Initial excavation confirmed the presence of a great many modern services criss-crossing the site to a depth greater than one metre, and work was suspended several times in order that services, where still live, could be re-routed. On completion of this work excavation recommenced to 2.5 m depth.

The earliest deposit seen was (6), the natural gravel which clearly had been truncated by (5), a deposit of mixed mid-dark brown clay loam with some red brick fragments and 2% medium subangular silt, which immediately sealed it. Deposit (4) was a very mixed mid brown/gray silty clay loam with many lenses of fine-coarse subangular gravel, and also what appeared to be redeposited natural gravel, and contained the majority of the modern services seen.

This material was sealed by (3), a makeup layer comprising whole and crushed Type 1 hardcore, whole and fragmented red housebricks, concrete lumps and very occasional pieces of unworked limestone. This deposit was consistent except for where it was cut away by [2], a modern drainage culvert. Both (3) and [2], with the exception of its access manhole, were sealed by (1), the flagged surface of Third Quad.

6 Finds

Finds were limited to 19th and 20th century building material and occasional fragments of transfer printed willow pattern; nothing pre-dating the 19th century was identified. This being the case, finds were identified and examined on site but not retained.

7 Environmental results

Full consideration was given to sampling strategies, however due to the absence of any significant archaeology, no environmental soil samples were taken.

8 Discussion

The watching brief was able to confirm that modern features and deposits comprising various services, a large modern drainage culvert, basementing of Third Quad and associated activity have truncated any pre-existing archaeology to a depth greater than one metre. It is thought likely that any deposits associated with the New Inn would have been in the upper metre of the excavation (B Durham, pers. comm.), and no archaeology was seen once modern deposits had been cleared; natural deposits, also truncated, were identified below this point to the base of dig. It is thought likely that any archaeology present has been removed by this activity, although it is at least

possible for the back range of the inn still to be in existence elsewhere in the immediate vicinity.

References.

Wilkinson, D (ed) 1992 Oxford Archaeological Unit Field Manual, (First edition, August 1992).

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scale 1:1250

Location of site

Figure 1



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