

The Provost's Garden Wall, The Queen's College, Oxford



Historic Wall Recording

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The Provost's Garden Wall, Queens Lane

The Queen's College, Oxford

NGR SP 5174 0636

Built Heritage Recording

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1 INTRODUCTION AND LOCATION

- 1.1.1 The Queen's College are proposing to construct a new underground library extension within the college Provost's Garden (Planning Ref: 07/01232/FUL – approval of time extension 10/03007/EXT), Oxford (NGR SP 5174 0636).
- 1.1.2 Planning approval for the development was given in 2008. A condition addressing the archaeological potential of the site was attached to the planning permission. The condition and its requirements were detailed in a brief issued by David Radford, Oxford City Council's Archaeologist (OCC 2008).
- 1.1.3 To allow access to the site during the construction phase a c.4m section of the boundary wall facing Queens Lane will be dismantled and as part of the wider archaeological mitigation a record of this section of wall was required prior to the start of works. The current document forms the short report detailing this recording.
- 1.1.4 In due course a major archaeological excavation will be undertaken and a detailed report (and publication) will be produced following this. This wider publication will include analysis of the development of the area which will be of relevance to the current short section of wall.
- 1.1.5 The four metre section of wall is located at the north-west corner of the Provost's Garden in the north western quarter of Queen's College, High Street Oxford at NGR SP 51745 06365. The wall faces Queens lane. The site lies within a Conservation Area and the boundary wall (including the subject of the current study) are is a Grade II listed structure.
- 1.1.6 This list description for the wall along the northern side of the Provosts Garden (including the short stretch covered by the current work) is:

THE QUEENS COLLEGE, BOUNDARY WALL ON QUEENS LANE TO WEST OF LIBRARY
Grade II
Entry No: 1046640
1485 Boundary wall on Queen's Lane to West of Library SP 5106 SE 9/355J II 2.
C18. Rubble with triangular coping.

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1.1 Historically the site lay within the medieval walled town, but in the eastern part that may have been a secondary addition to the primary Saxon town, in the parish of St Peter in the East. The area was occupied by long narrow medieval tenements fronting the High Street to the south, which were presumably established prior to the Norman Conquest (Salter 1921, 326-331). The buildings survived in truncated form until the 18th century.
- 2.1.2 Queen's Lane (formerly Torald Street) may originally have continued past the parish church of St Peter's towards the east wall, and it is likely that houses lined the road in the 13th century.
- 2.1.3 The formation of The Queen's College was a gradual process. The site was mostly acquired between 1340 and 1347 and the fellows of the new college (founded in 1341) must first have occupied the existing houses. Building of the gatehouse fronting Queen's Lane began in 1352, and by the end of the century a quadrangle with a chapel and a hall was completed, but did not yet encroach upon the High Street. The Provost's Garden has always been open ground. In general, the north-east corner of Oxford fell



into decay in the 14th century, a process which was hastened by the spread of Black Death in 1349.

2.1.4 The 18th-century rebuilding of Queen's College swept away all previous buildings except the Williamson Building, and gave the college a rectilinear layout based on the new High Street frontage. The new buildings were partially cellared, with a narrow wine cellar down the middle of the hall, and a cellar in the space between the hall and kitchen, but no cellar beneath the kitchen itself (as confirmed by recent Oxford Archaeology The Queen's College, Oxford Kitchen Extension Archaeological Investigation Report explorations). The cellarage is linked to the cellars below the west range (buttery), and there is one short return to the north (just west of the kitchen) which may have given access for coal or other goods. The cellars are stone vaulted, but with few architectural features of note. There is also a crypt beneath the chapel, and this was uncovered in 1976 when the coffins of former provosts were noted (UAD No. 743).

2.1.5 *Cartographic Evidence relating to the 4 m section of wall*

2.1.6 The current study has not included an exhaustive study of cartographic evidence but it has examined the maps reproduced in the 2007 Historical Report by Rick Mather Architects.

2.1.7 These suggest that at the time of Ralph Agas's map (1578) the area which later became the Provost's Garden, together with the wall in the current study, were part of an orchard. David Loggan's map from 1675 and the contemporary view in *Oxonia Illustrata* also suggest that at this date the Provost's Garden had not yet been fully established and that the wall in the current study had not yet been constructed. William William's plan of 1733, which post-dates the substantial building programme at the college from c.1700, suggests that the Provost's Garden had by now been enclosed and the brewhouse had been constructed. The map does not depict the distinctive kinked wall which forms the subject of the current study at the north-west corner of the Provost's Garden although it is possible that the plan was not detailed enough to show this subtle detail.

2.1.8 Longmate's plan of 1773 does clearly show the kinked wall as well as several new buildings to the south suggesting that the yard with the brewhouse had been developed in the mid 18th century. The 1773 map does not however show a range to the north end of this yard (ie immediately west of the kinked wall) which is shown on later plans. This range at the north end of the yard is shown on Robert Hoggar's plan of 1850 with a kinked east end mirroring the orientation of the adjacent section of wall. These two walls were either side of a passage through from Queen's Lane to the brewhouse yard although the kinked wall appears to be significantly longer than the surviving rump which forms the subject of the current report (probably twice as long).

2.1.9 A similar arrangement at the north-western corner of the Provost's Garden is shown on the very detailed 1:500 town plan of 1876 (see Figure 2) and the detail of this map confirms that the wall was clearly longer than the wall in the current study. The map also shows that the adjacent range on the opposite site of this passage was a stables and also that there was a pier at the corner junction between the main wall facing Queen's Lane and the kinked wall flanking the passage.

2.1.10 This layout with the kinked section of wall, the passage and the gate pier at the corner is again shown on a college block plan of 1912 while in 1936 there were several proposals for the remodelling the yard to the west of the Provosts Garden which would



have included the replacement of the kinked wall with a squared corner to the garden. This scheme was not undertaken and a plan from 1948 shows a broadly similar layout in the area to the north-western corner of the college as from earlier in the century. The gate pier at the corner is still shown in-situ.

- 2.1.11 In 1958-60 the existing Provost's Lodgings was constructed on the western side of the Provost's Garden and the kinked wall at the north-western corner of the garden was almost certainly shortened to its current c.3.5 m length as part of these works. These works included the creation of the short lay-by immediately north of the Provost's Lodgings, and west of the wall in the current study, by the removal of the previous building here which faced onto Queens Lane.

3 RECORDING OF WALL

3.1 Methodology

- 3.1.1 The recording of the wall has been undertaken broadly at Level 2 as defined by English Heritage in *Understanding Historic Buildings: a Guide to Good Recording Practice* (2006). Both sides of the wall were photographed with a high resolution digital SLR camera and with a 35 mm camera (black and white prints). The wall has been analysed and described in terms of its construction, alteration and phasing. The site records will be added to the overall archaeological archive of the forthcoming excavation project.

3.2 General description

- 3.2.1 As detailed above the section of wall is located at the north-western corner of the Provost's Garden at the point where the main alignment of the wall facing Queens Lane steps back in a south-westerly direction to connect with the Provost's Lodgings. The wall comprises a main old section c.3.5 m long (SW-NE) and then a short westerly spur at the south-west end which connects with the mid 20th-century Provost's Lodgings and is contemporary with it.

3.3 East side (within Provost's Garden)

- 3.3.1 The east face of the wall comprises the following distinct sections (see Figures 3):
- 3.3.2 **[1]** this section appears to represent the main primary face of the wall probably constructed in the mid 18th century. It is formed from a relatively soft limestone (probably from the Headington quarries) and is heavily weathered in parts. The faces of many of the stones are blackened from pollution and in many areas are coming away from the main stone behind. The stonework is dressed and laid in regular courses with a soft lime mortar. The stone blocks are between 28 cm and 22 cm tall and although they vary in length they are generally c.40-60 cm long. The character of this section of wall is different to the main, adjacent east-to-west wall which fronts Queens Lane as it is formed from larger stones and at the junction between the two it appears that the south-westerly kinked wall abuts the main street-front wall. It may be that the wall originally continued right along Queens Lane and that the opening was created within it to allow access to the rear service yard.
- 3.3.3 **[2]** This is a small area of infill or patched repair formed from smaller stones than [1] and bonded with a relatively smooth salmon-coloured cement mortar. The larger stones measure c.30 cm by 10 cm while the smaller ones measure c.15 cm x 10 cm. This repair may be of the same date as other repairs (eg 4-5)



- 3.3.4 **[3]** This is a regular patch of coursed, dressed stone and although its character is quite different from the other areas of secondary repair (2, 4, 5) it is possible that it is from the same phase as them. It appears to use the same smooth cement mortar as the other areas of re-facing. The stones are large measuring from 23 by c.60 cm to c.30 x 23 cm.
- 3.3.5 **[4]** This context has two sections with each one formed from relatively small stones grouped together to form sections of similar stones. This context is partially coursed and it appears to be formed from stones similar to the sloped cap [6].
- 3.3.6 **[5]** This context is within [4] and is probably contemporary with it but it is formed from much larger stones with a different character. There are three stone blocks in this context measuring c. 25 cm tall by c.25-36 cm wide. It is possible that the blocks could be reused stones from the primary wall [1] but the coursing is different to that of the primary wall.
- 3.3.7 **[6]** The top of the wall is formed from a shallow sloping cap of roughly coursed and roughly squared stone. The character of the stone varies in different areas and there is likely to be areas of repair or rebuilding but the nature of the stonework means that it is difficult to identify these with certainty.
- 3.3.8 **[7]** Regular ashlar stonework constructed in c.1958-60 when the adjacent Provost's Lodging was added. This wall would have been constructed to cap the truncated section of NE-SW wall when it was shortened.

3.4 West side (facing Queen's Lane)

- 3.4.1 The west side of the wall comprises the following distinct sections (see Figure 4):
- 3.4.2 **[10]** Regular coursed, dressed stonework although there is some variety in the stone types with some older than others. This was clearly a reconstructed corner and it is bonded with smooth cement mortar. As detailed above there was a projecting pier at this point, probably from the original construction of this kinked wall until the construction of the Provost's House in 1958-60. The pier is shown on a plan of 1948 so [10] must post-date this.
- 3.4.3 **[11]** This is the oldest section of this face of the wall and is constructed from uncoursed stonework with non-dressed blocks of various sizes. The character of this section of stonework is broadly similar to that of the main wall facing Queens Lane (ie the section not being impacted in the current project) although as detailed above it is not thought that the walls were contemporary with each other. This section has a very coarse, hard mortar which is believed to be a secondary repointing which hides the earlier mortar behind. Many of the stones have blackened faces from pollution but this does not continue on the coarse-mortar pointing. The mortar here is earlier than the smooth mortar in [10]. There are two small wooden blocks built into the wall, clearly for nailing things to.
- 3.4.4 **[12]** This is a large section of re-faced stonework with a wide variety in stone types and sizes but it all appears to be from a single phase. Indeed this appears to be from the same phase as [10], bonded with the same smooth mortar. Most of the stonework is dressed and coursed but some sections use rougher stone. The stones tend to be grouped together to form courses from a single type of stone but again this is not entirely consistent.



- 3.4.5 **[13]** This side of the wall has a similar sloped cap to the opposite face formed from generally uncoursed stone. Most of the stone blocks are small but some are larger and similarly to the opposite face there are sections where some repairs have probably been undertaken. There is a string course at the base of this section.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1.1 The short kinked section of post-medieval wall at the north-western corner of the Provost's Garden appears to have been constructed in the mid 18th-century to line an access route from Queen's Lane to a rear yard which included the college brewhouse. It has seen much repair and patching but it retains historical fabric and the current works have helped understand the gradual evolution of this section of wall.
- 4.1.2 The east face of the wall essentially comprises the primary face [1], a series of repairs [2-5], the sloped top [6] and the mid 20th-century ashlar 'cap' [7] to terminate the truncated wall.
- 4.1.3 The west face also comprises an early section [11] which has been heavily repointed and large areas of re-facing [11, 12].



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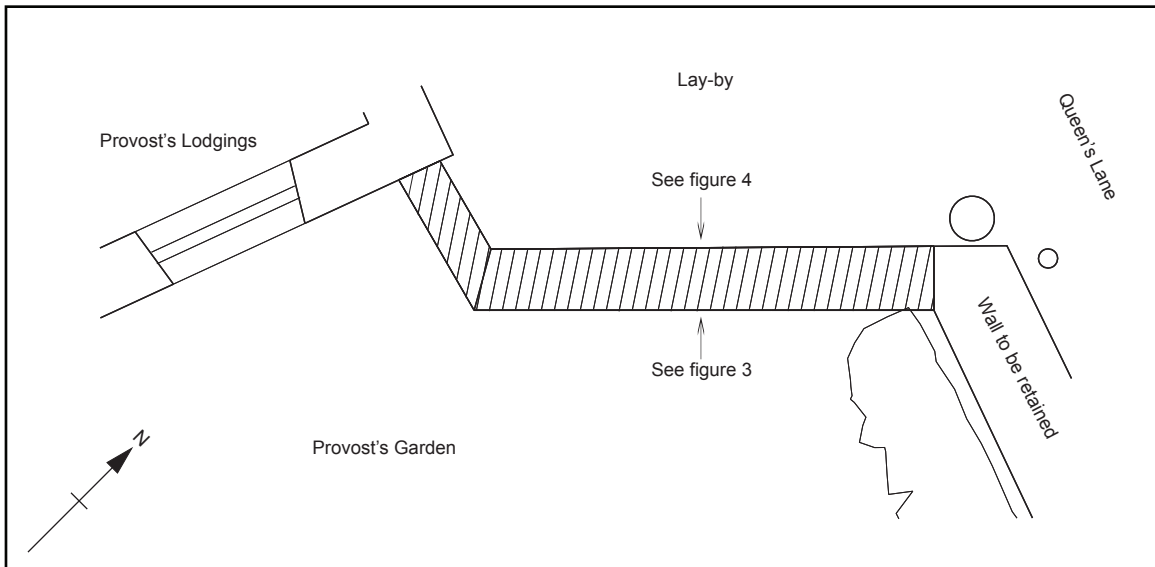
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Scale 1:15,000

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Figure 1: Site location

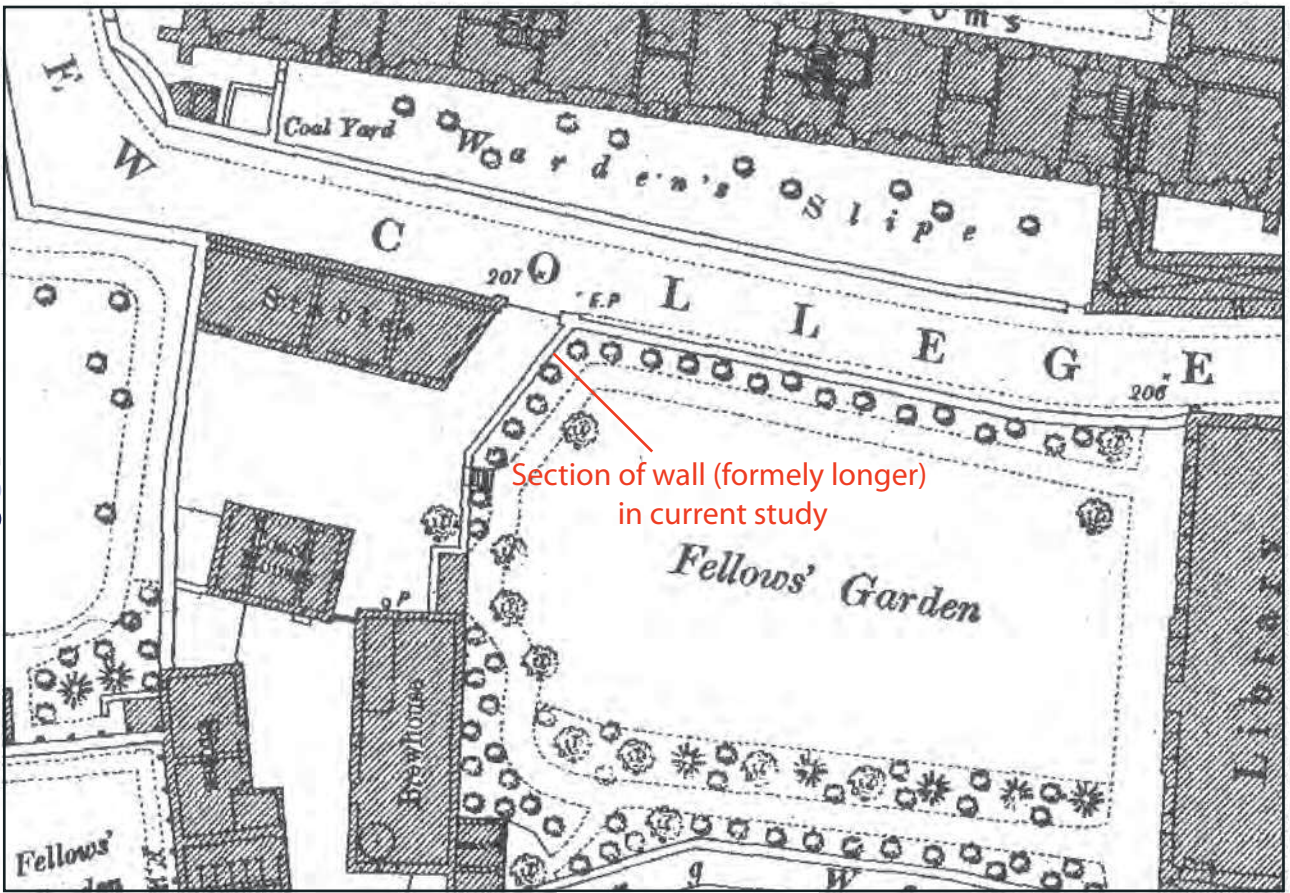


Figure 2: Extract from 1:500 town plan (1876)



Figure 3: East face of wall showing phasing (see section 3 of text)

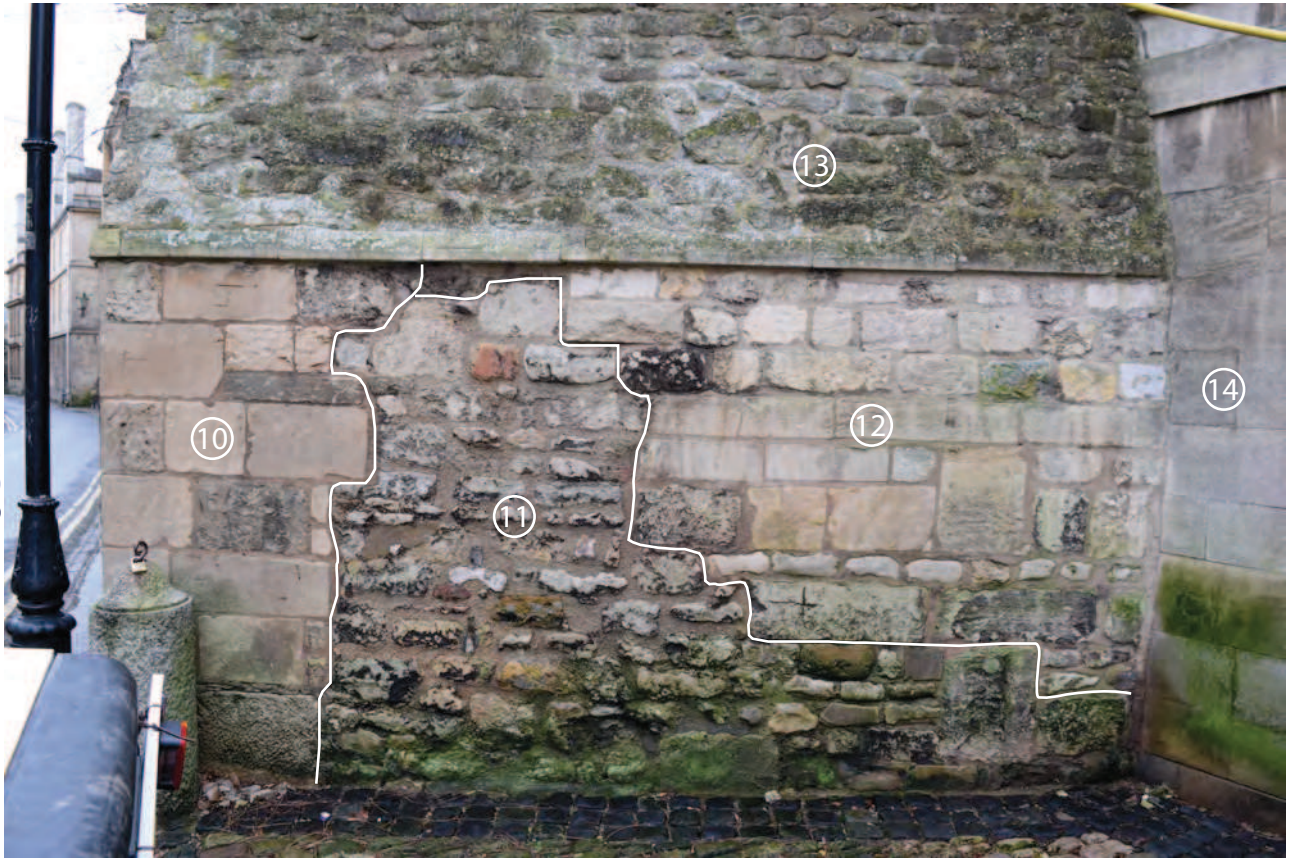


Figure 4: West face of wall showing phasing (see section 3 of text)



Plate 1: General view of west face of wall



Plate 2: General view of east face of wall



Plate 3: Provost's House with kinked wall to right



Plate 4: View of main wall along Queen's Lane (outside current works)



Plate 5: South half of wall facing lay-by off Queen's Lane



Plate 6: North half of wall facing lay-by off Queen's Lane



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