



JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF TEST PITS

AT

1 FISHER ROW, OXFORD OX1 1JY

**NGR
SP 50890 06158**

On behalf of

Balfours LLP

SEPTEMBER 2017

REPORT FOR Balfours LLP
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SUMMARY

Archaeological monitoring of two geotechnical pits was carried out within the rear extension to 1 Fisher Row, Oxford (NGR SP 50890 06158). It revealed a sequence of deposits indicating several phases of occupation and redevelopment of the building, dating between the post-medieval and the modern period.

At least three previous phases were recovered in the former kitchen area, represented by a brick floor revealed at a depth of 0.5m below the current stone floor level, dated to the post-medieval period, a mortar floor and a later clay floor, recovered at a depth of 0.35m below the current surface, indicating that this area underwent a possible change of use during this third phase.

A post-medieval hearth was uncovered at a depth of 0.5m ca. below the present stone floor in the vault area. A possible later surface or floor level was also observed, only visible in the north-facing section of the excavated area.

The current stone slab floor, recorded in both rooms, is dated at least to the 19th century and represent the latest redevelopment of the building.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The proposed development site is located at 1 Fisher Row, Oxford (NGR SP 50890 06158). It is currently a residence. The site lies on the Thames floodplain overlaid by alluvium. The site lies at approximately 60m aOD.

1.2 Planning Background

A planning application has been submitted to Oxford City Council for conversion of dwelling house to create 1 x 1-bed and 2 x 2-bed apartments (Use Class C3), including demolition and erection of a two storey rear extension, and first floor rear extension and formation of rear terrace at second floor. Some geotechnical pits are to be excavated to inform the engineering of the construction. The Oxford City Archaeological Officer has requested that an archaeologist is present during the work.

1.3 Archaeological Background

1 Fisher Row (a grade II listed building) lies on the lower branch of Fisher Row, and is part of a riverside stretch of properties in the St Thomas Parish of Oxford, which run from the site of the Old Castle Mill, northwards up towards what is now the Oxford canal basin. Number 1 Fisher Row, often known as the ‘Tawney Townhouse’, is a prominent example of a late eighteenth century red-brick townhouse, and remains one of the few properties along Lower, Middle and Upper Fisher Row to have survived various bouts of demolition and rebuilding which took place throughout the early & mid-20th century (Worlledge Associates 2017).

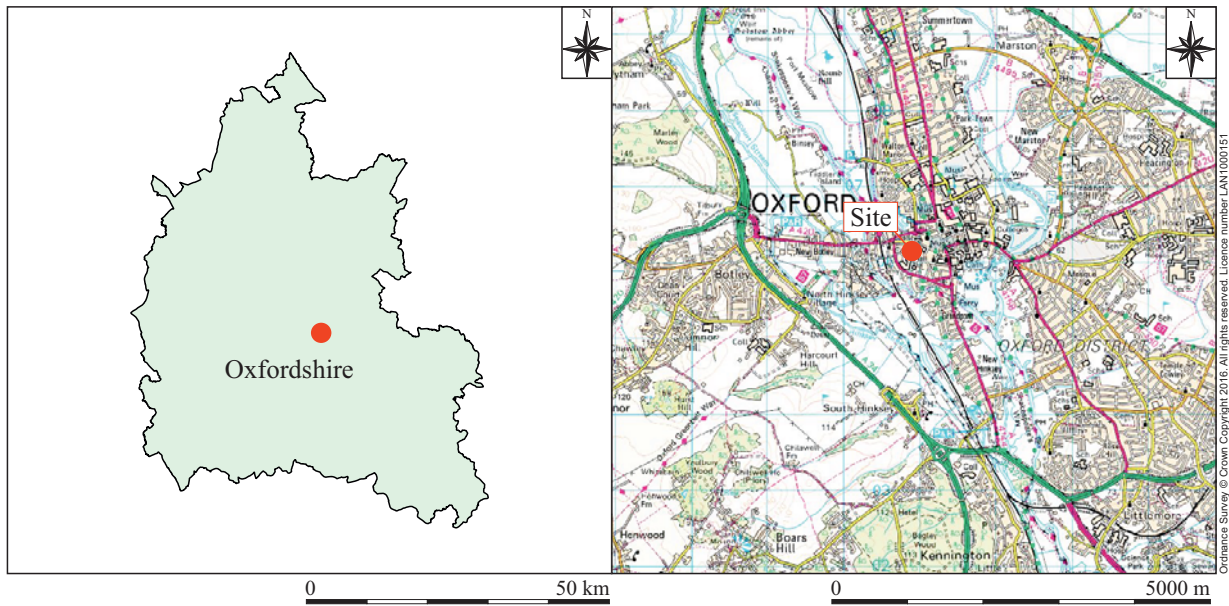


Figure 1: Site location

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To identify and record any significant archaeological remains revealed by the geotechnical pits.

In particular:

- To identify potential prehistoric remains in the area and the use of the waterway in connection to river traffic and the nearby site of the mill at Oxford Castle.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with Oxford City Archaeological Officer, the archaeological advisors to the Oxford City Council.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014).

3.2 Methodology

Two geotechnical pits were hand excavated in the vaulted above ground cellar and in the former kitchen. Final extent and location of the pits were determined by the conditions of the rooms and the difficulties of access and spoil management. The pits were excavated to a maximum depth of 0.5m below the current stone floor level.

Where archaeological horizons were encountered they were cleaned by hand and excavated appropriately. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was also produced.

The resultant spoil from the works was visually scanned, especially for finds relating to the previous phases of occupation of the building and to the potential prehistoric activity.

4 RESULTS

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts, numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material, while numbers in bold indicate structural features.

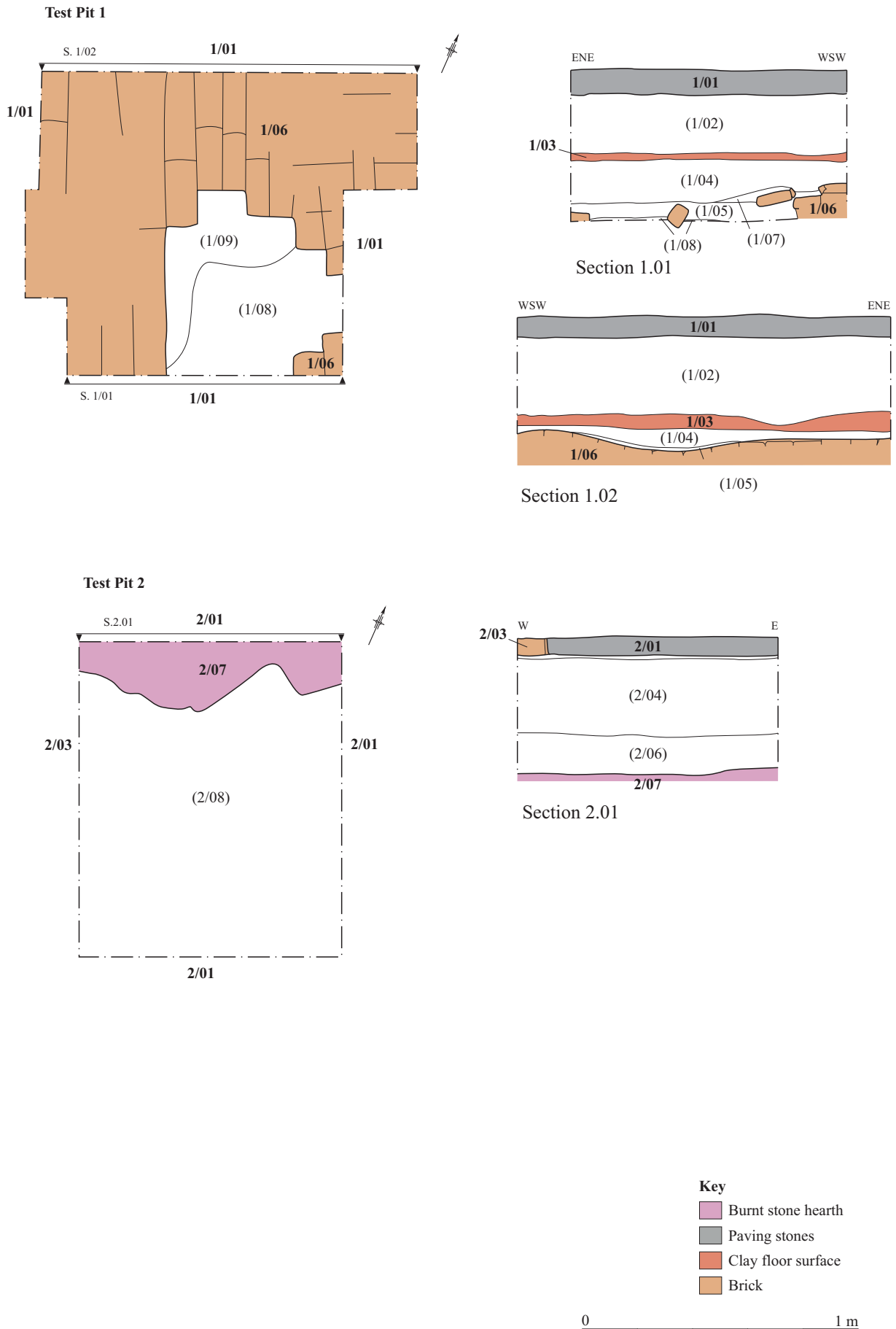


Figure 2: Plans and sections

4.1 Test Pit 1 (Figure 2)

Test pit 1 was located in the kitchen room, and orientated NE-SW. It measured 1.1m in width and a maximum of 1.35m in length; the irregular extent of the pit was determined by the presence of large stone slabs constituting the current floor surface of the cellar. A brick floor was encountered at a depth of *c.* 0.45m from the present floor level; therefore, the required depth of excavation of 0.5m was reached only in the eastern corner of the pit, where the brick floor was already disturbed by later activities.



Plate 1. Test Pit 1

The lowest layer revealed was (1/08) a light brown clay deposit with occasional gravel, visible in the eastern corner of the trial pit. This deposit, tentatively identified as a possible earlier surface or floor level, was not further investigated as extending below the required depth of excavation. No artefacts were seen.

Above (1/08) a 3m thick layer of burnt material (1/09) was observed, extending underneath brick floor **1/06** and virtually identical to deposit (1/05), found above the same structure **1/06**. The nature of this deposit remains undetermined, although its presence both above and below brick floor **1/06** suggests the use of the room remained unchanged over time.



Plate 2. Test Pit 1 section, showing layer (1/05)



Plate 3. Test Pit 1 section, showing brick floor **1/06** and clay floor **1/03**

Floor **1/06** was a stretcher bond brick floor, extending beyond the limit of excavation. The bricks, measured 230x100x60mm, and were bonded with a sandy mortar. Later activities observed in the eastern area of the test pit disturbed floor **1/06**, resulting in the partial removal of the bricks. Localised settling of the bricks resulted in an uneven level as shown in Fig. 2 Section 1.02.

Above the brick floor a deposit of burnt material (1/05) was recorded, measuring a maximum of 0.05m in thickness, as observed in the southern section of Test pit 1.

Building materials including slate and ceramic roof tile were recovered from this deposit, as well as a single 17th century pottery sherd.

Deposit (1/05) was overlain by a very compacted (hard) sandy mortar layer **1/04**, interpreted as a floor surface, extending across the excavated area and measuring *c.* 0.04m in thickness overlying a make-up layer that contained very frequent brick fragments. Other materials recovered included oyster shell, clay tobacco pipe, glass and early 18th century pottery.

Clay floor **1/03** was recorded above this layer. The compacted deposit, extending beyond the limit of the excavation, measured 0.03m in thickness and was devoid of any inclusions. The installation of a new floor level of different material could indicate a change of use of the room. A slight depression in clay floor **1/03** was observed in the south-facing section, apparently orientated towards a now blocked door in the northern wall of the room. This could represent the remains of a drainage system, designed to facilitate the movement of excess water towards the door and outside.

A 0.28m thick deposit of compacted, mid-dark brown sandy clay (1/02) overlaid floor **1/03**. This contained building materials, faunal remains, tobacco clay pipe, and residual fragments of medieval pottery, and was interpreted as a levelling layer connected to the construction of the current stone slab floor **1/01**. Deposit (1/02) was seen as a single layer during site work due to the poor light. Plate 3, taken with flash photography, shows that it is three layers of material.

4.2 Test Pit 2 (Figure 2)

Test pit 2, measuring 1.15m in length and 0.95m in width and orientated NNW-SSE, was located in the innermost partition of the western vault. The excavation reached the required 0.5m depth and revealed a series of levelling deposits above the remains of a possible hearth.



Plate 4. Test Pit 2



Plate 5. Test Pit 2 section, showing hearth **2/07**

The lowest layer encountered was a soft, mid-brown sandy clay deposit (**2/08**), extending beyond the limits of excavation and of undetermined depth and function. The deposit was not further investigated as extending below the required depth of excavation. No materials were recovered.

Above this deposit a scorched limestone structure **2/07** was observed. This was identified as a possible hearth.

Hearth **2/07** was overlain by a 0.08m thick made-up ground deposit (**2/06**), formed by mid-brown, soft sandy clay, and extending across the excavated area.

The north-facing section of test pit 2 revealed a layer (**2/05**) of compacted, silty clay with frequent stone and gravel, measuring c. 0.9m in width and 0.04m in thickness. The full extension and function of the deposit remain undetermined, although it could represent the remains of a floor level or surface.

The uppermost deposit consisted of a very compacted, sandy silty clay deposit (**2/04**), measuring 0.22m in thickness. It contained building material fragments, animal bone, tobacco clay pipe and modern pottery, and was interpreted as a levelling deposit connected to the construction of the current stone slab floor **2/01** and the adjacent brick structure **2/03**.

The latter was a stretcher bond brick structure, extending outside the excavation area towards NW and SE. The bricks, measuring 230x110x100mm, were bond by sandy mortar (**2/02**). **2/03** was tentatively interpreted as the remains of an undetermined structure altered or demolished at the same time the current stone slab floor **2/01** was built.

4.2 Reliability of Results

The poor lighting conditions in the vault imposed the use of artificial lighting, limiting the visibility of more subtle details in the deposits in Test pit 2. However, the reliability of results is generally considered to be good.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 7 sherds with a total weight of 80g. It was all medieval or later. The medieval material was recorded using the conventions of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1994), as follows:

OXAM: **Brill/Boarstall Ware**, AD1200 – 1600. 2 sherds, 57g.

The post-medieval wares were recorded using the conventions of the Museum of London Type-Series (eg. Vince 1985), as follows:

CHPO: **Chinese Porcelain**, 1650+. 1 sherd, 1g.

LONS: **London Stoneware**. 1680+. 1 sherd, 6g.

PMR: **Post-medieval Redware**, 1550+. 1 sherd, 9g.

SWSG: **Staffordshire White Salt-Glazed Stoneware**, 1720–1800. 1 sherd, 6g.

TGW: **English Tin-Glazed Ware**, 1600-1800. 1 sherd, 1g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region. All the assemblage comprised bodysherds other than the fragment of SWSG, which was from the lid of a small tea-pot, a typical product of the tradition.

	OXAM		PMR		TGW		CHPO		LONS		SWSG		
Context	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	Date
1/02	2	57											13thC
1/04							1	1	1	6	1	6	E18thC
1/05					1	1							17thC
2/04			1	9									MOD
Total	2	57	1	9	1	1	1	1	1	6	1	6	

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

5.2 Faunal and Floral Remains

5.2.1 Animal Bone by Roxanne Blanks

A small assemblage of faunal remains were recovered during archaeological monitoring at 1 Fisher Row, Oxford. The total assemblage consists of 15 fragments of bone from unidentified mammal and avian remains (Table 2). The assemblage is relatively well preserved and shows little taphonomic damage and some evidence of butchery. The assemblage also displays a small amount of pathology with periosteal new bone evident on two ribs (context (1/02)). All of the remains were identified in

accordance with Hillson's (1992) and Schmid's (1972) identification manuals, in cases where no diagnostic features were present an unidentified status was assigned.

Context	Identification	Skeletal element	Number of fragments	Weight (g)	Comments
1/02	Unidentified mammal (probable <i>Sus</i>)	Ribs	5	75.5	One rib head. Two rib shafts, one displaying fine slice marks, a scoop mark and periosteal new bone. Two ribs that are approximately 50% complete (head and shaft), one of these displays periosteal new bone. All ribs are from the left side
		Unidentified mammal	Ribs	2	5.9
		Metacarpal/metatarsal	1	11.5	Has a chop mark through the mid-diaphysis
		Unidentified	1	1.9	
1/04	Unidentified mammal	Ribs	1	2.2	
		Phalanx	1	2.5	
	Unidentified avian	Humerus	1	1.6	
1/05	Unidentified mammal	Phalanx	1	4.9	
2/04	Unidentified mammal	Ilium	1	44.1	Displays fine slice marks on the iliac blade
		Orbital	1	3.6	

Table 2: Animal bone occurrence by context and type

- Taphonomy

The assemblage displayed little taphonomic damage, and the taphonomic modifications fall within the expected range.

- Trauma/butchery

A left rib shaft from context (1/02) displays evidence of butchery in the form of a scoop mark, and several fine slice marks. A chop mark was observed through the mid-diaphysis of a small mammal metacarpal/tarsal from the same context. Whilst the partial Ilium of an unidentified mammal (probable *Sus*) from context (2/04) displays three fine slice marks on the iliac blade.

- Pathology

Two of the rib shafts from context (1/02) display periosteal new bone on the inferior surfaces. Periosteal new bone occurs in response to infection or inflammation (Waldron, 2008).

- Discussion & concluding remarks

The remains were recovered from layers rather than contained within the fill of features. This means that it is difficult to interpret the circumstances surrounding the deposition of the faunal remains. However, given the completeness (incomplete approximately 50% of the bone remaining in all cases) of the remains and the

presence of evidence of butchery it is likely the remains constitute domestic waste. It is not recommended that this assemblage is retained as it has limited potential for future research.

5.2.2 Oyster Shell *by Simona Denis*

A very limited assemblage of 5 oyster shell fragments, of a combined weight of 20.4g, was recovered from Test pit 1.

Three of the examples from levelling layer (1/02) were positively identified as right valves, while the remaining fragment was found to be a left valve, as was the single example recovered from preparation/levelling layer (1/04) (Winder 2011).

Context	Type	No. of Items	Weight (g)	Context Date Range
1/02	Right valve	3	16	Post-Medieval
	Left valve	1	4	
1/04	Left valve	1	0.4	Post-Medieval

Table 3: Oyster shell occurrence by context and type

It is not recommended to retain the oyster shell fragments due to their very limited potential for further analysis.

5.2.3 Charcoal *by Simona Denis*

2 fragments of charcoal, weighing 2.6g combined, were collected as a sample of the material observed in levelling deposit (2/04). The hand-recovered fragments were preserved to a maximum length of 20mm, and appear to have originated from a small branch.

It is not recommended to retain the charcoal fragments.

5.3 Clay Tobacco Pipe *by Simona Denis*

A small assemblage of 10 clay tobacco pipe stem fragments, weighing 32.3g in total, was recovered from 3 individual contexts. The material, although extremely fragmentary, is in a good state of preservation.

The entirety of the collection was composed of plain, undiagnostic and unmarked stem fragments, a regular occurrence in clay tobacco pipe assemblages. The single example recovered from layer (1/04) preserved part of the base, unfortunately too fragmentary for the type to be identified.

Context	Type	No. of Items	Weight (g)	Comments	Date Range
1/02	Stem	7	20.2		Post-Medieval
1/04	Stem with partial base	1	6.2	Oval cross section. Base type unidentified	Post-Medieval
2/04	Stem	2	5.9		Post-Medieval

Table 4: Clay tobacco pipe occurrence by context and type

The vast majority (80%) of the group was collected from Test pit 1; the remaining 2 items were found in Test pit 2.

It is not recommended to retain the clay tobacco pipe stem fragments due to their very limited potential for further analysis.

5.4 Glass by *Simona Denis*

A single fragment of extremely degraded glass was recovered from layer (1/04). The object, measuring 31x29mm and weighing 2.5g, is a fragment of flat glass, apparently preserving one edge, indicating a possible function of window glass.

A possible pre-modern date is suggested for the object, purely on the basis of the level of degradation, uncommon in modern glass.

The glass fragment is not recommended for retention due to its extremely poor state of preservation and very limited potential for further analysis.

5.5 Building Material by *Simona Denis*

5.5.1 Slate

Two fragments of slate were found during the excavation. The item collected from layer (1/05), although extremely fragmentary, was in a fair state of preservation and was positively identified as slate roof tile, dating to the 19th century.

Context	Type	No. of Items	Weight (g)	Date Range
1/02	Undetermined	1	0.8	19 th C
1/05	Roof tile	1	155.6	Post-Medieval

Table 5: Slate occurrence by context and type

It is not recommended to retain the slate roof tile fragment due to its extremely limited potential for further analysis.

5.5.2 Stone

The stone assemblage collected during the excavation represents a sample of the material recovered. It included stone roof tiles found in two individual contexts, as well as a fragment of hearth **2/07**.

- Roof tile

Two examples of limestone tiles were selected for retention. The objects, although fragmentary, retained one of the peg holes typically found in roof peg tiles.

Context	Type	No. of Items	Weight (g)	Dimensions (LxWxT) (mm)	Comments
1/02	Peg tile	1	932	183x156x10	One complete corner, one complete peg hole
2/04	Peg tile	1	369	150x148x10	One complete peg hole

Table 6: Limestone roof tile quantification

- Hearth

A sample of heart **2/07** was collected for analysis. The fragment, measuring 400x200mm, weighs 3kg *ca.* and was positively identified as scorched limestone.

5.5.3 Ceramic Building Material

The Ceramic Building Material assemblage collected represents a sample of the material recovered. It included brick and roof tiles, and a fragment of brick from floor **1/06**. The material, dating to the post-medieval period, was found in a fair state of preservation although extremely fragmentary.

Context	Type	No. of Items	Weight (g)	Dimensions (LxWxT) (mm)	Comments
1/05	Roof tile	1	99.7	90x75x10	No complete dimension preserved
1/06	Brick	1	415.6	90x90x43	Complete thickness. Traces of mortar on lower face
2/04	Undetermined	1	7.8	32x25x20	
	Ridge tile	1	111.1	60x60x15	Complete thickness. Curved. Traces of brown glaze

Table 7: Ceramic Building Material quantification

5.6 Metalwork by *Simona Denis*

A small assemblage of 2 metal objects, weighing 10.1g in total, was recovered from two individual contexts within Test pit 1.

Context	Material	Type	Weight (g)	Length (mm)	Comments
1/02	Fe	Nail	6.2	42	?T-head. Point missing
1/04	Fe	Nail shaft	3.9	15	

Table 8: Iron nails occurrence by context and type

The items were positively identified as fasteners, although the extremely poor state of preservation, showing severe oxidation, prevented the observation of any further manufacturing details.

It is not recommended to retain the iron nails due to their extremely unstable state of preservation and their very limited potential for further analysis.

6 DISCUSSION

The archaeological monitoring carried out at 1 Fisher Row, Oxford, revealed a sequence of deposits indicating several phases of occupation and redevelopment of the building, dating between the post-medieval and the modern period.

Test Pit 1 revealed the presence of at least three previous floor levels in the former kitchen area. Brick floor **1/06**, revealed at a depth of 0.5m below the current floor level, dated to the post-medieval period; the presence of two very similar deposits of burnt material both above and below the structure suggest the use of the room remained unchanged over this phase of occupation. A sherd of pottery from the burnt material above the brick floor is dated from the 17th century to the end of the 18th century and must be from the use of the building during the early 19th century sometime after it was built in 1799. The similar deposits immediately beneath and above the brick floor suggest that this floor was not the original floor. The brick floor was replaced by a mortar floor.

Later clay floor **1/03**, recovered at a depth of 0.35m below the current surface, indicates that this area may have undergone a change of use during this phase. The choice of a waterproof material such as clay, combined with the presence of a possible drainage device, suggests a change in the nature of the activities carried out in the room. The orientation of the depression in clay floor **1/03** towards a now apparent blocked door (identified from an architect's photograph) in the northern wall of the room indicates the excess water was directed outside of the building, and then presumably towards the stream to the south-western, as the path towards Castle Mill Stream at this stage would already have been blocked by the buildings along Lower Fisher Row. This suggests that the garden area of the almshouses next door was accessible to this house.

The current stone slab floor **1/01**, dated at least to the 19th century, represent the latest redevelopment of the room.

The most significant feature in Test Pit 2 was a possible post-medieval hearth **2/07**, uncovered at a depth of *c.* 0.5m below the present stone floor. A possible later surface or floor level is represented by deposit (2/05), only visible in the north-facing section of the excavated area.

The current floor surface in the vault is composed by stone slab floor 2/01, identical to the present floor recorded in the kitchen area; however, the presence of a brick structure in the westernmost section of the room indicates that at least one additional redevelopment took place within this room.

The majority of the pottery appears to have been products already owned by the residents before the property was built and they moved into it and as such do not help with dating of the individual phases of the floors.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

Written scheme of investigation
The project report
The primary site record

Physical record

Finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the Oxfordshire County Museum Service with the accession number OXCMS: 2017.122.

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