

Trench 3: Excavation Report

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Trench 3 was 3m by 2m and located just over 4m south of Sector E of Trench 1 (the south-western stretch of the Chapel wall). Excavation in Trench 3 explored medieval features, dating to the site's time as a leper hospital and almshouse, and upper layers producing finds which reflected subsequent activities on the site from perhaps the 1600s to the 19th and early 20th centuries. Signs of the collapse, demolition and/or levelling of stone-built structural features, as well as evidence of disturbance by activity in the later phases of use, make it difficult to be precise yet about sequences and dating. The presence of a 17th century type of tobacco pipe bulb within a context containing sections of Victorian drainage pipe illustrated this.

The principal feature revealed was the rectangular stone structure in the north-eastern trench corner. Although the building produced fragments of human bone it was unclear whether this reflected its original function or resulted from later disturbance. However undisturbed floor deposits remained around the in-situ flagstone within the building. Spot-dating of pottery from these floor levels suggest a 12-13th century date span for the structure's use. If the bone is significant the feature may have been a shrine, vault or ossuary. The example of the medieval hospital at Partney in Lincolnshire raises the possibility that it might have been a detached bell-tower (Atkins and Popescu 2010). Whatever the structure's original function, it collapsed or was demolished, possibly during the 14th century.



Figure 1 Alan and Rob discussing Trench 3: looking west

The stone feature just to the south of the building and projecting from the south baulk, looked like the corner of a small structure and resembled stone-lined graves found elsewhere on site. This was associated with ash and there are precedents at other Oxford sites for evidence of burning in the form of ash and charcoal in ecclesiastical burial contexts (see below). Bulk and small finds from across the trench included: glass, pottery, bone (animal and human), oyster shell, iron nails and roof tile. A large proportion, particularly of the non-bone finds, came from the part

of the trench *outside* the area occupied by the two stone features. Many represented post-medieval activity. Some, including the bulb of a tobacco pipe, dated to the 17th century, perhaps from the Civil War occupation by Parliamentary troops, who could also have contributed to disturbance of the ground and the deposit of debris from fires found outside the structures. Fragments of stone roof tile may reflect the demolition of the small stone structure or one of the many episodes of rebuilding of the Chapel itself. 19th century agricultural activity was indicated by: bulk and small finds; considerable disturbance of topsoil layers; the amount of organic material present; and sections of 19th century ceramic drainage pipe running diagonally across the SE corner of the trench. The last was not the only 19th century drainage feature found on the wider Bartlemas site. These drains are an indication of the persistently poor drainage in the whole area.

Trench 3 Excavation Narrative

Introduction

Trench 3 was 3m by 2 m and located in an area to the south of the western half of the chapel.

The co-ordinates of its corners were:

NW corner: SP 53471, 05462; 68.64 OD

NE corner: SP 53475, 05461; 68.59 OD

SW corner: SP 53470, 05458; 68.52 OD

SE corner: SP 53474, 05458; 68.54 OD

The aim of excavating in this area was to allow comparison with Trenches 1 and 2 and to see if the area around the chapel had been utilised in different ways. The area had been covered by dense vegetation for some time and was surrounded by trees and shrubs, which had allowed for only limited geophysical survey prior to excavation. The results of this survey had been inconclusive. The trench had been de-turfed by a mini digger.



Figure 2 Nineteenth century ceramic drainpipe: looking north

The topsoil (**3000**), which was approximately 0.05m deep, was composed of organic, compact sandy clay, produced by the decomposition of organic material. Within this context a nineteenth century ceramic drainage pipe made up of four 0.3m long segments was uncovered running NE-SW across the south-eastern corner of the trench. The pipe continued into the eastern and

southern baulks and did not appear to line up with any known buildings. The segments of pipe were not joined together in any way. They were merely lying adjacent to each other. Some of the segments were at slightly different levels. This was probably due to the ground subsiding at different rates because of the structure subsequently discovered within the trench and partially below the pipe. This pipe was probably a nineteenth century land drain (similar to another discovered within the grounds of Bartlemas House to the north of the Chapel and linked to the water feature east of the house). The bulb of a seventeenth century clay pipe was also discovered within this context, suggesting that the area was very disturbed.



Figure 3: structure corner: looking north

As the depth increased limestone rubble began to become apparent in the eastern portion of the trench (3005). The rubble was mostly 0.01m^3 , but some stones were much larger ($0.25\text{m} \times 0.20\text{m} \times 0.08\text{m}$). As this context was excavated small voids appeared in the soil. This was probably due to its loose nature. The rubble eventually resolved into a structure with three walls [3004], [3006] and [3009] that disappeared into the northern and eastern baulks. Wall [3004] was aligned N-S and the visible portion was 1.20m in length; it consisted of two courses or perhaps foundations and first course. The top course consisted of three large, widely-spaced stones. [3006] was aligned W-E: it was only partially visible as its outer edge lay beyond the eastern trench edge. Its visible length was 1.10m and it was 0.35m in height. It also appeared to consist of two courses, but was very disturbed and may represent the southward collapse of tumble from a wall slightly to the north. In contrast with the other two walls, the stones of [3006] were heavily mortared; one

stone having a curved or arched appearance. Wall [3009] ran in a W-E direction as the return of [3004]. It was 1.10m long and 0.20m in height. Its courses were arranged in a random fashion, but there appeared again to be two visible. In the corner with [3004] one large flagstone (0.35m x 0.40m) was uncovered. It was probably the remains of a floor surface. The walls were laid on a layer of pea shingle (3015), which may have been a foundation layer for both the walls and a flagged floor.

The size of the structure uncovered was approximately 1.5m by 1.5m, but its exact dimensions are unknown as it disappeared into the baulks. However the presence of the Chapel to the north and the lack of any equivalent structural remains in the nearest sector of Trench 1, suggests it was a relatively small building and certainly not joined to the Chapel. It contained some fragmentary human remains, some of which were located on the same level as a crude iron ring. However it was relatively sterile in terms of finds, suggesting that the building was demolished quickly and did not fall slowly into disrepair, and that it was kept clean and was perhaps not used for any domestic purpose. It is difficult to say what the purpose of the building was, but several theories have been proposed including: shrine, vault or ossuary. The medieval hospital at Partney had a small, separate bell tower close to the Chapel (Atkins and Popescu 2010).

To the south and east of the structure layer (3003) was mid greyish brown silty sand with small lenses of clay. This context was very different to those inside the structure in terms of the number and variety of bulk finds which included: glazed tile, nails, small pieces of lead, a possible sherd of 'shelly-ware', oyster shell fragments and pieces of a shattered red pottery vessel. There was also significant evidence of animal bone working, suggesting a period when the graveyard was used for other purposes. This deposit may have accumulated after the structure was demolished and may relate to the disruption of the Civil War period



Figure 4 Nathalie recording Trench 3: looking NW

To the south of the structure, in the south-eastern corner of the trench, there was a small grouping of stones which included two vertically placed stones at right angles to each other, forming a corner feature [3019]. This is possibly the corner of a stone lined grave, similar to those found in other parts of the site, continuing south into the baulk. The grave was surrounded

by a very disturbed ashy charcoal layer **(3016)**, the fill of a very disturbed, truncated and hard to discern grave-cut **[3018]**, associated with the highest concentration of bulk finds in the adjacent context **(3013)**. **(3013)** may have been associated with disturbance of the grave and could originally have constituted part of the grave-fill. If **[3019]** is a grave it is likely that **(3016)** may have acted as a backfill or foundation for it. Several examples of graves lying on beds of charcoal and compacted ash, radio carbon dated to between AD810 – 1160, are known from other Oxfordshire ecclesiastical excavations (Scull 1988, 33; Boyle 2001, 341; Hassall 1972, cited in Boyle 2001, 366). Additionally John Blair cites evidence of an earlier grave in which a fire had been lit prior to use (1998, 11). SK13, in particular, and perhaps SK11 in Trench 2 also seemed to have been laid on a layer of ash.

References

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Figure 5 Trench 3 looking south-east



Figure 6 Trench 3 from above, eastern end