

EXOP TEST PIT 72

Location: Bartlemas Chapel, Cowley

Date of excavation: 6-8 November 2013.

Area of excavation: 0.8m x 1.2m, at the eastern end of the chapel.

Weather conditions:

Day 1: Overcast with late showers.

Day 2: Overcast. Light to moderate rain throughout the day.

Day 3: Overcast. Light to moderate showers. Heavy rain after lunch (from 12pm onwards) until the excavation concluded at 3.00pm.

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Report by: Prepared by Kristyn Maguire, based on the work and observations of the team.

GPS Location and OD: SP 53485.5, 05471.8, c 68.75m OD

I. Introduction

During the 22 September – 4 November 2011 excavation at Bartlemas Chapel, a range of disarticulated human remains from charnel pits were temporarily disinterred. Following analysis and recording of these bones they were to be reburied at Bartlemas Chapel. A 0.8 m x 1.2 m trench – Test Pit 72 – was dug from the 6th to the 8th of November 2013 at Bartlemas Chapel in order to reinter the bones within the chapel burial ground. The digging of the interment site followed normal test pit recording protocol, which meant that any artefacts, building remains, or human or animal bones discovered would be accurately recorded. These test pit results would be used to further enhance findings from the 2011 excavation.

The eastern end of the chapel was chosen as the re-interment site. This location was selected for a variety of reasons, which were as follows: 1) The 2011 excavation had revealed that the western side (front) of the chapel was extensively used as a burial site, and thus it would be very difficult to find a burial plot in this vicinity that did not already contain human remains. 2) The south side of the chapel possessed a number of mature apple trees, to the south of the new drainage ditch that surrounded the chapel, and thus digging in this area would be difficult; 3) The north side of the chapel did not have any ‘open’ land, as it was covered by a gravel path and flower beds.



Figure 1: Disarticulated bones recovered during the 2011 Bartlemas Excavation were placed into a coffin for reburial.

Excavation in Test Pit 72 revealed three important finds – two burials that appeared to be articulated skeletons (the burials were not fully uncovered in order to ascertain if they were complete) and a structural feature. The articulated skeletons were reached in the final context, (104). Once the skeletons were revealed, digging in this area ceased. This was the result of two factors: 1) The excavation permit for Bartlemas Chapel stated that articulated skeletons were not to be removed or disturbed and 2) the minimum depth for the ‘coffin’ to be safely deposited had been reached at this stage. Therefore, the skeletons were merely noted but were not analysed. The other important find was a small wall resting on a limestone dogger, which was uncovered in Context (103). This may well have been contemporaneous with the period of the medieval leper hospital, and could have possibly served as an outbuilding or may have been linked to the wall remains found in Trench 1 Sector C in 2011 and interpreted as an eastern annex to the Chapel. Layers above this feature revealed post-medieval activity, probably from the 1600s onwards. These finds were in keeping with results from the 2011 excavation. A heavily packed rubble layer (Context 102) suggested demolition or rebuilding debris connected to the Chapel building constructed in the 14th century – perhaps the results of one of the many neglect and repair cycles. Rubble from this layer was primarily composed of what appeared to be building material – mortar, nail, glass shards, possibly from a Chapel window. Spot dating of pottery from this rubble layer revealed a possible later 16th to early 17th century Brill Boarstall ware base. It was hypothesised that this layer may have been purposely built up after the Civil War. This suggests that the Chapel could have been heavily damaged during the Civil War period. A mixture of disarticulated human and animal bone was found scattered throughout the layers, suggesting this was a heavily-used graveyard where later graves and rebuilding work around the Chapel had disturbed earlier burials. The fact that so any bones were discovered in charnel pits in 2011 supports this theory.

II. Excavation Summary

Test Pit 72 was 0.8 by 1.2 m and located in an area to the east of the chapel.

The co-ordinates of its corners were:

NW corner: 453485.58, 205471.83, 68.75m OD

NE corner: 453486.66, 205472.12, 68.75m OD

SW corner: 453485.79, 205471.11, 68.73m OD

SE corner: 454386.99, 205471.45, 68.75m OD



Figure 2 – Test Pit 72 was excavated on the east side of the chapel.



Figure 3 - Context (101) was found directly under the turf layer.

The excavation took place on the flat turf lawn to the east of the chapel, which was bounded by small shrubs located in a raised garden bed. The trench was deturfed by hand with Context (100) – the turf layer - being approximately 70mm deep. Directly underneath this layer was Context (101) which was composed of dry, mid-blackish brown, sandy silt (15/85). This layer ranged in depth from 70mm to 140mm. This layer was dug by trowel and hand shovel. Limestone flecks were noticed in this layer together with very occasional pieces of charcoal. Other notable inclusions were angular limestone pieces (25mm to 65mm), less than 5%; oyster shell fragments (<1%). While there was only a small amount of stone noted throughout the layer, limestone cobbles (<10%) were discovered along the western edge of the trench. It was hypothesised that they may have related to a pathway or suggested the beginnings of a structural feature.

Finds recovered suggest Context (101) was a relatively modern, disturbed top soil layer with mixed period artefacts. Modern artefacts were recovered alongside earlier pieces, notably a stoneware sherd which possibly dated from the 18th century. Other finds included less than 1% bone (possibly animal and human), glass (<1%), flint (<1%), ceramic (<1%), a stonesfield roof tile (105mm x 110mm), modern slate (<1%); CBM (<1%); nail (<1%), a piece of paper from a milk bottle; and coke pieces (<1%). There was minimal contamination from roots (<5%) and worms (<2%), with no noticeable bioturbation.

Context (102) was directly underneath Context (101), and was reached at a depth of 140mm. It was dry, mid-yellowish brown with a higher concentration of sand in the sandy silt soil composition (30/70) than seen in Context (101). It was also noticeably more abundant in small rounded limestone fragments (5%) and limestone flecks. Other inclusions were flint, oyster shell fragments, gryphea (all <1%) and large flat limestone pieces (approximately 90mm x 65mm) (<2%). What had originally appeared as 'limestone cobbles' along the southern edge began to take the form of a structure, possibly a wall. This feature was surrounded by rubble with the whole top layer of Context (102) being comprised of 50/50 rubble and grit to soil, which eventually increased to 80% rubble towards the bottom of this context. At the 160mm mark the rubble layer had become more pronounced (comprising 75% to 80% stone). A mattock was used to remove the rubble layer. It was suggested this section was purposely built up, perhaps as a result of rebuilding after the Civil War. This conclusion is supported by the lack of material (ceramic and glass) dating from after the Civil War in this layer. The finds were predominately comprised of building material – mortar, nails, glass shards (possibly from the Chapel windows) – and bone. All finds groups in this layer, except bone, comprised less than 1% of the layer; whilst disarticulated human and animal bone comprised less than 2%. A jaw bone

(possibly from a sheep) comprised part of the animal bone assemblage. Some of the animal bones also appeared to have butchery cut marks. Other finds included: 1 piece of glazed green ?tile, 2 x pieces of stonessfield roof tile (170mm x 104mm and 110mm x 100mm), a later 16th to early 17th century Brill Boarstall ware base and a clay pipe. Two other ceramic sherds were also found in this layer; one piece was blue and white transfer-ware whilst the other was cracked white ware. At the 180mm mark the dump of gravel seen in this context along the northern side of the trench, which caused the excavation team to question whether a path or a man-made drainage channel had been created in this area.



Figure 4 – The top of Context (102) looking south. South-west corner reveals mortar associated with the wall feature.

Context (103) was a mid-greyish brown, sandy clay (20/80) with yellow mortar inclusions throughout. It ranged in depth from 300mm to 600mm. This soil was noticeably wet in this layer. This was most likely caused by a high water table, possibly exacerbated by the recent addition of a large pond in the garden of Bartlemas House, to the north-east of the chapel. The high water table was particularly evident along the eastern side of the trench, closest to the new pond.

What appeared to be part of a limestone dogger beside the wall had mortar attached, thus suggesting that natural limestone had been incorporated into the base of the wall. The wall was in line with other structures discovered at the east side of the chapel during the 2011 excavation. Inclusions included limestone (<3%), with some larger pieces with mortar attached (approximately 150mm to 100mm), more fossils (gryphaea) than seen in Context (102), although still less than 1% of the entire layer, charcoal (<1%), fine white flecks of mortar, approximately 28mm to 30mm in size, were found with degraded pieces of limestone with mortar attached. Flint and river pebbles (<1%) were also found.



Figure 5 - The bottom of Context (103). Note the significantly high water table.

There was a much higher concentration of what appeared to be human bone in this layer (<10%). The small disarticulated human bones found in this context may have been moved by water. The chunks of mortar and bone were noticeably discoloured by the high content of iron in the water; and the mortar colour ranged from red, yellow to light fawn. The lower section (pelvis and legs) of a skeleton, which appeared to be articulated, was found at the base of Context (103) dug into Context (104). The leg bones appeared to be shifted 45 degrees from their original position, which was most likely caused by the flow of water through the trench. Other finds included a nail, and three pieces of black unglazed pottery (one was a rim sherd).



Figure 6 – A close-up image of the ‘wall’ feature.

Context (104) was reached at a depth of 600mm. It was a wet, dark greyish black with an undulating natural-looking upper surface. Dark lenses of clay were particularly noted in the north-east corner. This is the same natural clay layer as seen in the allotment excavation EOXF TP30. There was an intercutting double burial noted in Context (104); one of the burials was first noted in Context (103), as discussed above. The burials were aligned west to east, in the same orientation as the original chapel, and were neatly laid out. The majority of articulated skeletons found during the 2011 excavation were also found at approximately the same depth, with the same orientation. The skeletons were cut into the top of the undisturbed natural clay. Once both burials were discovered excavation ceased. This meant that the skeletons, which appeared to be articulated, would not be disturbed. Also, the depth was adequate to safely deposit the coffin.



Figure 7 – Two skeletons were cutting into the top of Context (104).

III. Results

Spit/ cont xt	Type of deposi t	Description	Soil sampl e	Comments
100		Turf and humic top soil.	N/A	
101	Layer	<p>Dry, mid blackish brown sandy silt (15/85). 70mm-140mm deep. Clearly defined boundary.</p> <p>Inclusions: Angular limestone pieces (25mm to 65mm) (<5%), oyster shell fragments (<1%), limestone cobbles (<10%).</p> <p>Finds: Bone (<1%), glass (<1%), flint (<1%), ceramic (<1%), 1 x Stonesfield roof tile (105mm x 110mm), modern slate (<1%), 1 x piece of stoneware (possibly from the 18th century), CBM (<1%), Nails (<1%), Paper from milk bottle cap (<1%), coke pieces (<1%).</p> <p>* The CBM, roof tile and modern material was noted but discarded.</p> <p>Contamination: Roots (<5%), worms (<2%).</p>	N/A	

		<p>Physical relationships with other contexts: Below Context (100) – turf layer. Above Context (102).</p> <p>How was it dug: Trowel and hand shovel.</p>		
102	Layer	<p>Dry, mid-yellowish brown, sandy silt (30/70). More limestone flicks throughout soil than Context (101). 140mm – 300mm.</p> <p>Inclusions: Small, rounded limestone fragments (<5%), large flat limestone pieces (90mm x 65mm) (<2%), gravel and grit (50/50), charcoal (<1%), oyster shell (<1%), flint (<1%), gryphea (<1%).</p> <p>Finds: Metal slags and nails (<2%), ceramic (<1%), human and animal bone fragments (<2%), including a ?sheep’s jaw. Some of the animal bones appeared to have cut marks, 1 x glazed, green ?tile, 2 x pieces of Stonesfield roof tile (170mm x 140mm and 110mm x 100mm), 1 x Brill Boarstall ware base (possibly later 16th to early 17th century), 1 x clay pipe.</p> <p>Contamination: Under <1%). Less roots and worms than seen in Context (101).</p> <p>Physical relationships with other contexts: Under Context (100) and Context (101). Above Context (103).</p> <p>How was it dug: Mattock used to remove rubble layer. Trowel and hand shovel.</p>	N/A.	
103	Layer	<p>Wet, mid-greyish brown, sandy clay (20/80) with yellow mortar inclusions throughout. 300mm-600mm.</p> <p>Inclusions: Limestone (<3%), with some larger pieces with mortar attached (approximately 150mm to 100mm). More fossils (gryphea) than seen in Context (102), although still less than 1% of the entire composition of the layer, charcoal (<1%). fine white pieces of mortar, (approximately 28mm to 30mm in size), were found together with degraded pieces of limestone with mortar attached. Flint and river pebbles (<1%).</p> <p>Finds: Human and animal bone (<10%), 1 x nail and 3 x pieces of black unglazed</p>	N/A.	<p>The high water table was particularly evident along the eastern side of the trench, closet to the vicinity of the new pond. Bone and mortar recovered in this layer were noticeably discoloured due to a high content of iron in the water.</p> <p>A possible ‘wall’ was found in the south-west corner of the trench. A limestone dogger beside the ‘wall’ had mortar attached. The ‘wall’ was in line with other structures discovered at the east side of the chapel during the 2011 excavation.</p>

		<p>pottery (one rim).</p> <p>Contamination: Roots (<1%) – less than seen in Context (102). No worms noted.</p> <p>Physical Relationship with Other Contexts: Under Context (100), (101) and (102). Above Context (104).</p> <p>How was it dug? Mattock, trowel and spade.</p>		<p>A skeleton, which appeared to be articulated, was found at the base of Context (103), resting on top of Context (104). The leg bones appeared to be shifted 45 degrees from their original position.</p>
104	Layer	<p>Wet, dark greyish black, undulating natural clay layer. Lenses of clay in the north-east corner. Excavation ended once the top of (104) was reached – at a depth of 600mm.</p> <p>Inclusion: N/A.</p> <p>Finds: Two skeletons (most likely both articulated) discovered resting on top of Context (104).</p> <p>Contamination: No root activity noted. 1 worm seen.</p> <p>Physical Relationship: Below Context (100), (101), (102) and (103).</p>	N/A	

IV. Conclusion

Test pit 72 supported the findings of the 2011 excavation. These were: 1) substantial rubble found, which suggested the original Chapel had been substantially damaged and rebuilt. Based on the artefacts found in this layer, the substantial rubble could have been created during the Civil War. Historical research suggests the Chapel was damaged and the lead was stripped from its roof for shot. The Chapel was restored and re-roofed in 1649 when the almshouse was rebuilt (Franks 2011). A large quantity of nails, metal objects and some roof tiles attest to this. 2) Remnants of former structures on the east side of the chapel. They appeared to be at the same depth as the original chapel. The structures could date from the 13th to 15th century. 3) The skeletons found in this context followed the original chapel alignment. They were found at the same depth of other articulated burials during the 2011 excavation, and rested on the natural clay layer. It is likely that, based on their orientation, they pre-date the 15th century remodelling of the chapel, and finally 4) The graveyard was clearly well-used, as evidenced by the high volume of skeletons found around the chapel, as well as the frequency of charnel pits.

Bibliography

Franks, S (2011). 'Very Brief History of St. Bartholomew's Hospital'. Archaeology of East Oxford Project. Available at: <https://www.archeox.net/sites/www.archeox.net/files/reports/Brief%20history%20of%20Bartlemas.pdf>. Accessed December 1, 2013.