

Excavations at Magdalen College, Oxford. Medieval and Later Suburban
Tenements and the Cemetery of the Hospital of St John



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Medieval and Later Suburban Tenements and the Cemetery of the Hospital of St John

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Front cover: Post-medieval Buildings 9 and 10 and boundary wall 3312 during excavation

Rear cover: Glass bottle seal from Magdalen College Common Room dated 1769, from demolition of Building 9;
a selection of ceramic wig curlers from the same deposit; amber and jet paternoster beads, lost or discarded in
14th/15th century drain 8077; medieval tuning pegs from Tenement B

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Summary

Excavations within the New Library and Longwall Quad of Magdalen College revealed a complex sequence of well-preserved archaeological remains dating from the 10th century to the mid-19th century. The site was located in Oxford's former eastern extramural suburb, and large parts of three tenements dating from the 12th century were revealed, which succeeded late Anglo-Saxon ditches relating to a land boundary and one or more possible trackways. To the north of the tenements was a cemetery that contained at least 112 individuals, including adults, children and infants, in addition to which three neonatal burials were located within the tenements. Bayesian modelling and DNA analysis suggests that the cemetery was in use between the late 12th and early 13th centuries and is likely to belong to the as-yet unlocated first foundation of the Hospital of St John the Baptist. Several buildings, initially in timber and then from the 13th century in stone, were revealed along the High Street frontage and later expanded towards the rear of the tenements that hitherto contained many rubbish and quarry pits. By the 13th century two of the tenements incorpo-

rated smithies, and a large quantity of iron-smithing slag was recovered from both the floors and hearths of the buildings and from the fills of pits to the rear. One tenement was under the occupancy of Adam Faber, who was recorded as having a forge there in 1246–7. The animal bone, finds and documentary evidence suggest that the two tenements were also used for the shoeing and caring of horses. From the late 15th century, the tenements were rebuilt and took on a more domestic function, though little evidence beyond this date survived along the frontage area. Demolition deposits associated with a building to the rear of one tenement that dated to the late 17th century contained over 3600 pipeclay wig curlers, believed to be the largest assemblage found on an archaeological site. A date for the deposit was provided by a wine bottle seal marked 1769, when documentary evidence shows that the tenement was under the occupancy of John Broughton, a barber and peruke-maker. Evidence for 18th- and early 19th-century buildings was found in an adjacent tenement, which was the site of the Greyhound Inn on the corner of Longwall Street.

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