CASTLE, CANAL AND COLLEGE

Worcester Street Car Park, Macclesfield House: Historic Context Study

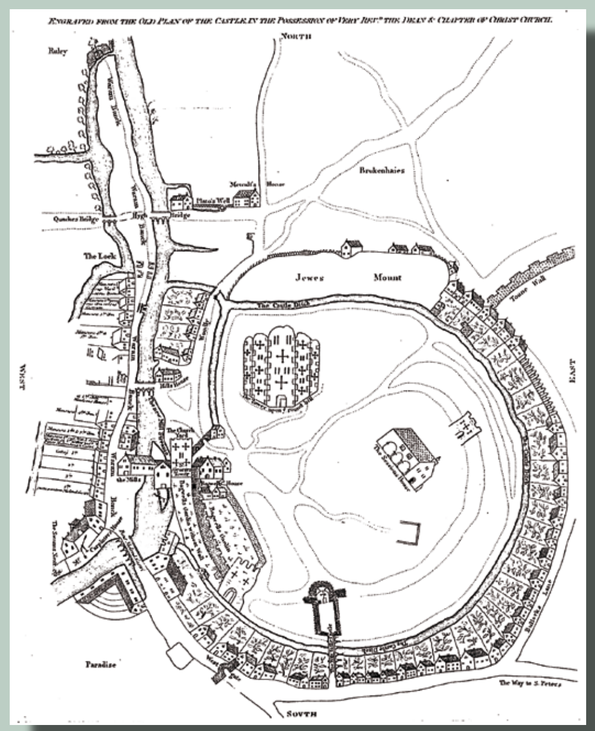
Today, these 2 sites seem to hold little of interest, a car park of 60 years, and a 1960s office building. Yet they hide a very different history and position within the ancient city and in 21st century Oxford. For together they lie at the core of the story of Oxford from the Saxon town and the development of the Castle revealing major aspects of the city's military and industrial past spanning 1000 years.

Originally a temporary measure there has been a car park at Worcester Street since 1949.

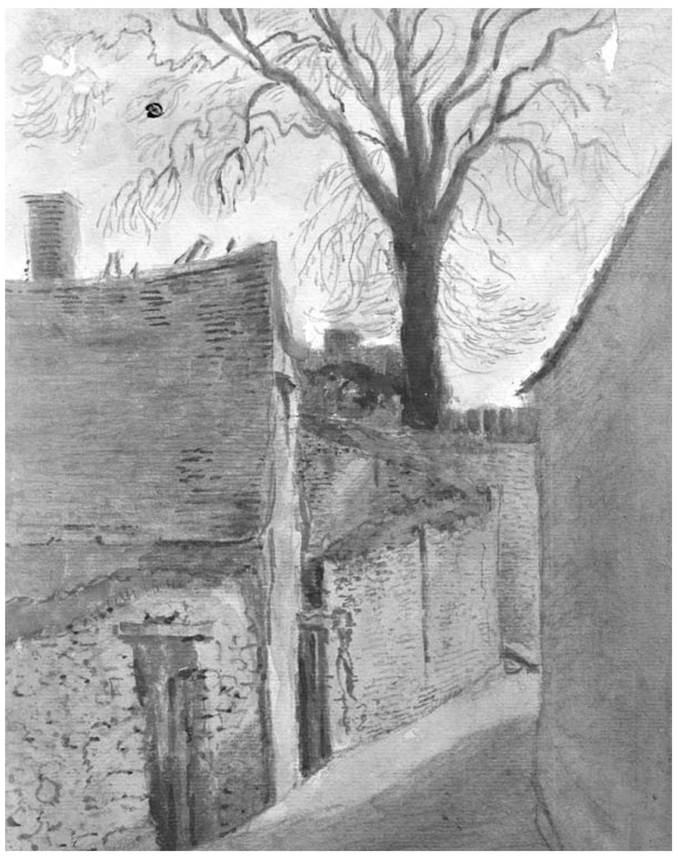
Oxford Preservation Trust, in partnership with Nuffield College and Oxfordshire County Council (owners of the Car Park and Macclesfield House respectively) commissioned Oxford Archaeology to carry out a study to inform the future development of these important sites in the West End of Oxford through an understanding of their past significance.

The area has long associations with the river Thames. Hythe Bridge Street may already have been a 'hythe' (a landing place) in Saxon times close by the early town which extended as far as St George's Tower in the Castle. Later, the Normans radically altered the layout of this quarter. They built the 'motte and bailey' castle in 1071 and canalised the river to feed its defensive systems, extending under the site of Nuffield College up to Bulwarks Lane and Paradise Street.

Macclesfield House, in Tidmarsh Lane, sits over the edge of the castle ditch. Early maps show the 12th-century siege mounds (Jews Mount and Mount Pelham), thought to be from King Stephen's 1142 siege of Matilda in Oxford Castle, lying partly within the area of the Car Park. Many people lived close by including a Geoffrey de la Barbican at the north end of Tidmarsh Lane where the remains of a western castle barbican may still lie. Over the next centuries the area declined and the castle buildings fell into ruin.



The Christ Church Plan of Castle and surrounding area c 1616 showing the extent of the ditches and a depopulated area.



Bulwarks Lane, drawing by John Malchair, late 18th century (*Bodleian Library, Minn Collection*). This historic lane, still much used today, follows the line of the castle ditch.

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