

Phases 8 – 11

The Post-Medieval Period

16th – 17th Centuries AD



Black Hall: the first clear buildings

The excavations revealed the remains of two post-medieval structures, one of which has been interpreted as a 17th century barn. Other features uncovered belonging to this time period include small pits and a courtyard area. These archaeological finds complement historical sources which record the presence of Black Hall Farm with its associated farmyard and outbuildings.

The Hall itself is first recorded in 1350 as standing to the west of the site; it was donated to Rewley Abbey by 1480 and acquired by St John's College, along with a sizeable parcel of land, in 1573. By this point Black Hall was a substantial farm with more than 100 acres of land, of which most was arable. Despite being affected by significant extensions and alterations over the years, parts of the existing Black Hall may date to the early 17th century. It is likely that this building, fronting onto St Giles, was the farmhouse, with the area behind it serving as gardens, yards and orchards with open fields to the north.

Putting it on the map

The first clear signs of a building on the site (Building A) consisted of the stone foundations of a small square structure to the rear of Black Hall. This appears to match a building depicted on Agas' 1587 map of Oxford which is the same shape and in the same location as Building A. Very little can be deduced from the remains of Building A about its purpose because it has been badly damaged by later activity: some of its stone footings have been robbed for reuse as building material and no internal deposits, which could indicate the building's use, were recorded. The date of the map, 1587, indicates that the structure was built during the 16th century at the latest. The same map shows the land occupied by the Kendrew Quadrangle site used for gardens and orchards as well as the building. This is reflected in the archaeological record as only a small number of pits of unknown purpose were found belonging to this period, suggesting that the site was open ground.

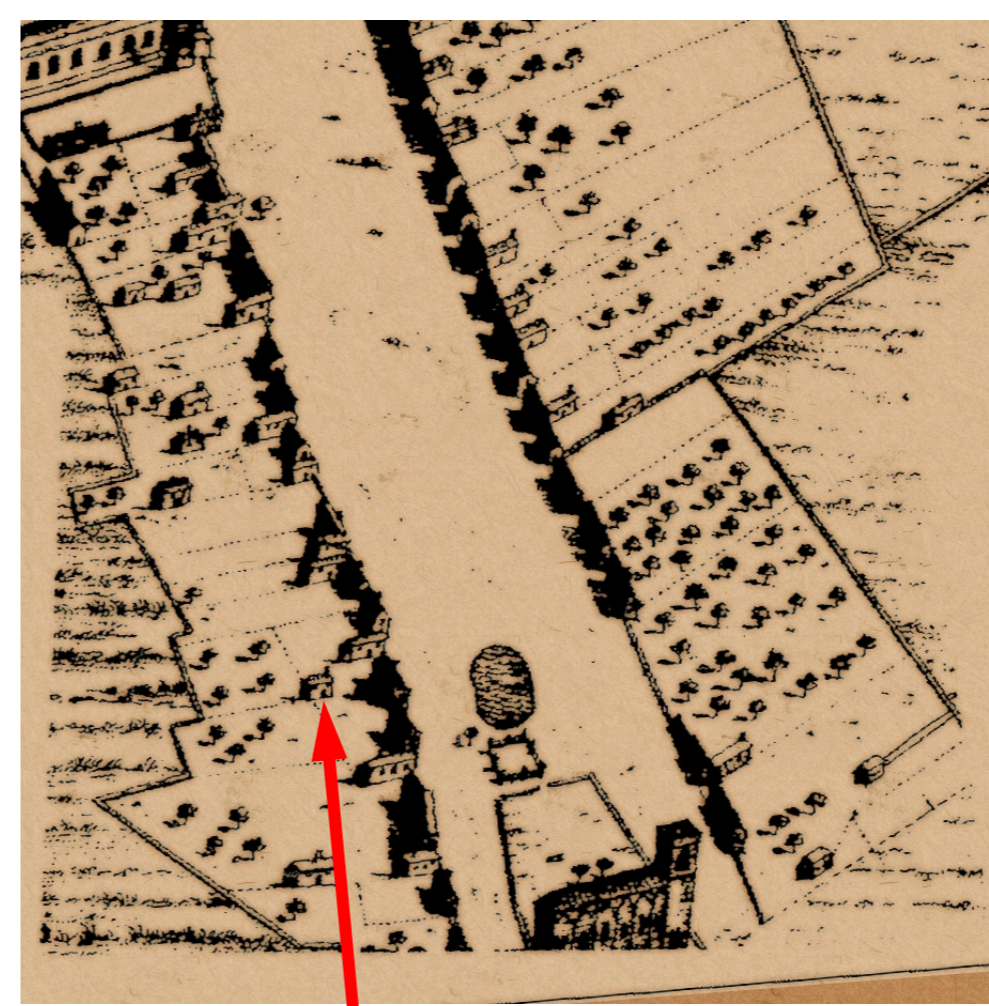
Loggan's map of 1673 clearly depicts Black Hall and the land behind it. This map not only shows the building first depicted on Agas' map (Building A) but also a longer structure to the east of it with a north-facing porch. The site as depicted on Loggan's map matches closely with the archaeological findings with the long structure (Building B) visible in its well-preserved foundations and a cobbled courtyard being uncovered in large areas just to the north. Additional walls joining Buildings A and B and leading towards St Giles complete the picture. Given the known history of the site at this time it seems likely that Building B was a barn, and that the farm complex was accessed from the main road. Unfortunately no deposits survived within the larger building to indicate its function so this cannot be proven.

Eating, drinking and gambling

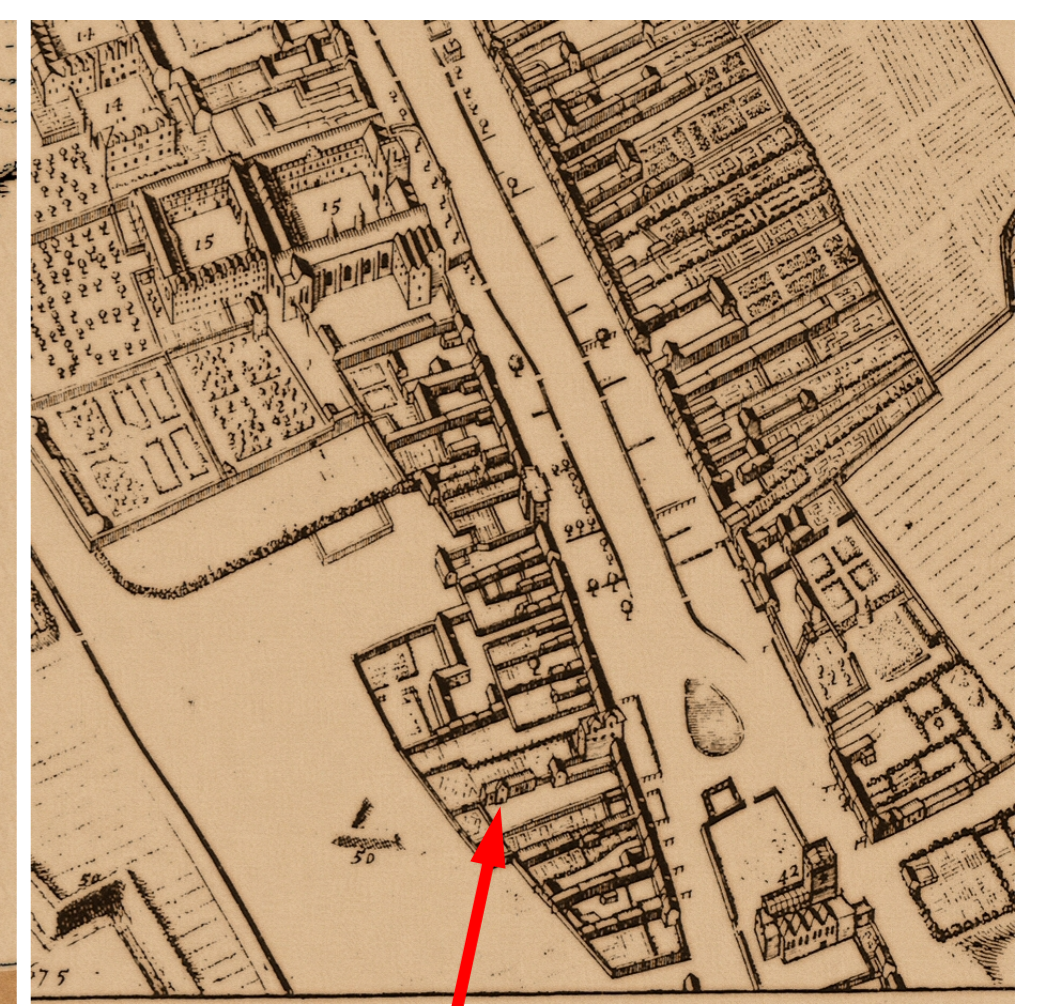
The excavators collected a range of pottery, animal bone and metal finds. Towards the early 16th century there was a distinct lack of vessels associated with the preparation, storage, serving and consumption of food. This, coupled with the large number of pottery lamps found, suggests that the southern part of the site was used by the, now defunct, St Bernard's College (which had replaced Durham College and was in turn replaced by St John's in 1555). The types of vessel found become more typical for an urban site until the late 17th- and early 18th-centuries when the increased wealth and importance of St John's College are seen by an increase in the amount of pottery found. Several noteworthy and rare vessels date to this later phase. These include a tin-glazed earthenware pedestal-footed flower vase, which has few parallels outside London, and a similar drug jar, dating to 1671-1700 and of either English or Dutch manufacture. More every-day examples of pottery from this phase include a near-complete large, shallow green-glazed dish and a well-used chamber pot.

The total amount of animal bone recovered from post-medieval contexts is significantly less than that from the earlier medieval period. The main species of animal represented in the finds are cattle, sheep and pig with only one or two examples of rabbit, hare and chicken and none of fish. Most likely these bones are the result of the domestic consumption of the farm attached to the college rather than the college itself.

Examples of metal finds from the post-medieval period include a silver penny, possibly dating to 1560-1581, during the reign of Elizabeth I, two jettons and a silvered copper alloy spoon. The jettons, both dating to the 16th century, were coin-like tokens used originally by traders as a method of accounting although, when they are found in areas not usually associated with trading, they may have also been used for gambling.



Building A (Agas 1587)



Building B (Loggan 1675)

Left: plan of the excavated buildings. (Note: the historic maps, above, are orientated with north at the bottom of the page).

