

Archaeologists uncover prehistoric landscape beneath Oxford

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Archaeologists excavating the former Radcliffe Infirmary site in Oxford have uncovered evidence of a prehistoric monumental landscape stretching across the gravel terrace between the Thames and Cherwell rivers.

The work was carried out over the summer in preparation for [Oxford](#) University's proposed Radcliffe Observatory Quarter - plans for which were revealed earlier this month.

In addition to these findings, the work has also uncovered evidence of a 6th century Saxon settlement, including a sunken featured craft hut known as a Gröbenhauser and a pit containing unfired clay loom weights.

A team from Museum of London [Archaeology](#) (MOLA) has been excavating parts of the 3.7 hectare site. The excavation has revealed evidence of three large prehistoric 'ring ditches' along with some evidence of possible associated cremation burials and an enigmatic rectangular enclosure, finds from which are currently being subjected to radio carbon dating.

Mike Wigg, Head of Capital Projects at Oxford University, said: 'The University was delighted to provide the opportunity for an investigation of Oxford heritage to be carried out in advance of any development work.'

The River Thames was an important focus for monument building in the Neolithic and [Bronze Age](#) periods when monuments used for burial, ritual and social purposes were constructed along the gravel terraces of the river.

A spokesperson from MOLA explained: 'Ring ditches are, as the name suggests, circular ditches, which are often the remains of ploughed out barrows, that may be associated with burials of high status individuals in the later Neolithic or Bronze Age, about 4000 years ago.'

The archaeologists had suspected the presence of prehistoric remains because a 12th century documentary source records 'the croft of the three barrows' in this area. Parch marks of a possible sequence of ring ditches in University Parks had indicated that similar remains might be present on the Radcliffe site.

The Saxon activity around the much earlier barrow cemetery is not uncommon and is recorded at other similar sites along the Thames. However, this is the first evidence for such a relationship in Oxford. The archaeologists are now working on the post-excavation phase of the project.

A Museum of [London](#) spokesperson said: 'We are grateful to the University for enabling this unusually large site to be archaeologically investigated. The knowledge obtained should make a significant contribution to public appreciation of this important part of Oxford's past, when the landscape was very different from that seen today.'

Provided by Oxford University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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