'Have you Found Anything Interesting?' Exploring Late-Saxon and Medieval Urbanism at Wallingford: Sources, Results, and Questions

N. Christie, O. Creighton, M. Edgeworth, and M. Fradley

SUMMARY

This short article outlines the aims, scope, and preliminary outcomes of the Wallingford Burh *to Borough Research Project – a major archaeological project funded by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) for 2008–10 and organized by staff from Leicester, Exeter, and Oxford universities working in close liaison with key local bodies (notably Wallingford Town Council, Wallingford Museum, The Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society (TWHAS), plus The Northmoor Trust and Reading Museum). The study was set up to provide a detailed archaeological analysis of Wallingford's origins, growth, and decline, and to put this into a broader regional, national, and European context of urban development.[1] It centres on a site with strong physical survivals from the early Middle Ages onwards and with much untapped documentary evidence.*

Wallingford stands alongside the river Thames in south Oxfordshire (formerly north Berks. until 1974), one of a number of prominent former Roman, Saxon, and medieval centres along a significant north-south stretch of the river, including Oxford, Dorchester, Abingdon, and Reading. Lacking any consistent Roman presence, Wallingford was founded as a late ninth-century Alfredian Wessex *burh* of major dimensions, from the outset designed to be the new shire centre. It later developed as a royal castle town under the Normans, put on the map for being the point where William the Conqueror and his army crossed the Thames en route to London.[2] The town and its castle played a significant role in the mid twelfth-century Anarchy period, withstanding numerous sieges. The Crown used and enhanced the castle during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries especially, but the town itself suffered early economic decline. The loss of various parish churches signifies some reduction (and likely relocation) of population even before the Black Death. The castle was less used in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, but elements at least of its then still highly visible defences were pressed into service in the mid seventeenth-century Civil War – again with Wallingford displaying extended resilience. Subsequent slighting removed substantial parts of the castle's numerous walls, and Victorian landscaping has also altered its site.

---

[1]   For project background and details of work carried out so far see http://tinyurl.com/excs-in-W, plus online site diaries for 2008 (http://www2.le.ac.uk/projects/wallingford_dig_2008) and 2009 (http://wallingforddig.pbworks.com). See also references in notes 4 and 5 below. This paper necessarily explores only the 2008–9 excavations, but briefly touches on the 2010 work, only some of which had been completed by the time of submission and revision of this paper. The project is supported by Wallingford Town Council and South Oxfordshire District Council, and works with both Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services and English Heritage on all fieldwork activities.

[2]   On the context of Wallingford's origins and growth see G. Astill, 'The Towns of Berkshire', in J. Haslam (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England* (Chichester, 1984), pp. 53–86; J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1994), pp. 101, 103, 117–19; D. Hill and A.R. Rumble (eds.), *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications* (Manchester, 1996); and P. Booth, A. Dodd, M. Robinson, and A. Smith, *The Thames through Time. The Archaeology of the Gravel Terraces of the Upper and Middle Thames. The Early Historical Period: AD 1–1000*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 27 (Oxford, 2007); plus, most recently, P. Booth, 'The Archaeology of the Wallingford Area before the Saxon Burh', in K.S.B. Keats-Rohan and D.R. Roffe (eds.), *The Origins of the Borough of Wallingford: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives*, BAR British Series, 494 (Oxford, 2009), pp. 5–12. For the town's archaeological setting and earlier finds see M. Airs, K. Rodwell, and H. Turner, 'Wallingford', in K. Rodwell (ed.), *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire: A Survey of the New County* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 155–62.

The strong preservation of the urban defences of Wallingford is striking: the earthen ramparts and ditch still prominently gird the town's western half, in places reaching 7 m height from bank top to ditch bottom, though most sections of the rampart bank are heavily overgrown. Equally powerful remains are the complex earthworks of the castle site in the town's north-eastern quarter, dominating the river and controlling the north gate; here the ground is open and managed (as municipal park in the south and pasture in the north), although the partially reduced motte is also tree and scrub covered (Plate 1, and Fig. 1). As long recognized by scholars, the town plan of Wallingford shows good traces of its early medieval and later configuration (although see 'Earthwork Survey' below), with elements of a grid layout in the south and evident medieval in-filling in the central spaces. The two sizeable open areas within the town's confines (Kinecroft and Bullcroft) as well as adjoining suburban green space all provide excellent archaeological scope to explore the town's origins, growth, and later-medieval contraction. A final core element of the historic town is the long stone bridge, which may be Norman in origin but has some clear Gothic architectural work part-encased in later reworking. The piers and superstructure in the river itself date mainly from an early nineteenth-century rebuild after serious flood damage (Plate 2). The bridge and river Thames played important defensive roles in both the Anarchy and Civil War episodes noted above.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND AIMS

The AHRC-funded *Wallingford* Burh *to Borough Research Project* was preceded by pilot study work in 2001–4. The pilot work comprised a first phase of geophysical and topographic survey in the town, notably resistivity work in the intramural open recreation spaces, and across the river at Riverside Meadows, Crowmarsh. The surveying was supported by small-scale test excavations near the town's eastern riverside wall, in Queen's Arbour due east of the castle, and at Riverside Meadows, plus initial compilation of archive data and grey literature, including previous watching briefs, larger interventions, river finds, and other materials.[3] Crucial elements of the archive material are the sizeable and fairly well-known, but never fully published, excavations by Nicholas Brooks and Bob Carr in the 1960s and 1970s respectively at the castle site. The first examined the defences, the North Gate, and an associated area of settlement, and the second exposed a well-preserved cob-built structure (probably a kitchen) in the southern, middle bailey. These both did much to identify the town's rich potential for both later-Saxon and post-Conquest medieval archaeology, and showed the likelihood of good stratigraphic preservation. That even the very centre of the town still offers much archaeologically has been borne out by excavations carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology in 2004 as part of redevelopment work for the new Waitrose supermarket at the High Street-Castle Street cross-roads. These excavations uncovered 210 tenth- to twelfth-century burials in the area of the lost church of St Martin's.[4]

The key aims of the pilot work were to assess the potential of the archaeological record of Wallingford and to identify a set of research priorities. The major AHRC award has enabled a full articulation of research, survey, and excavation (see 'Project Methods and Results', below), in collaboration with local and other partners, enabling a coherent and comprehensive exploration

[4]   For interim reports of the pilot studies, see, for example, N. Christie, O. Creighton, D. O'Sullivan, and H. Hamerow, 'The Wallingford *Burh* to Borough Research Project: 2002 interim report', *SMidlA*, 33 (2003), pp. 105–13; N. Christie, O. Creighton, D. O'Sullivan, A. Butler, J. Browning, and H. Hamerow, 'The Wallingford *Burh* to Borough Research Project: 2003 interim report', *SMidlA*, 34 (2004), pp. 94–103; and N. Christie, 'Wallingford, South Oxfordshire', *MedArch*, 49 (2005), pp. 402–5. Further summaries appear in the *MSRG Annual Report* and *MedArch*. For the 2008 interim, see G. Speed, N. Christie, O. Creighton, and M. Edgeworth, 'Charting Saxon and Medieval Urban Growth and Decay at Wallingford', *MedArch*, 53 (2009), pp. 355–63. The Northamptonshire Archaeology work on the Waitrose site is summarised in *MedArch*, 49 (2005), pp. 405–6, *SMidlA*, 35 (2005), p. 66, and Booth et al., *The Thames through Time*.

of the town's early medieval and medieval archaeological, material, and physical evolution. The focus is on the timeframe 800–1300, but with scrutiny also of the late- and post-medieval transformations of space and structures, since these too enhance our understanding of the modelling of this townscape. Furthermore, a wider landscape context for Wallingford is being explored (in terms of pre-*burh* settings, land use, settlement hierarchies, religious landscapes, and economics), and two related AHRC-funded PhDs place aspects of Wallingford's design and economy into wider national contexts. Finally, the link-up with TWHAS has been invaluable, not just for tapping into local knowledge and insights, but also because the group's documentary research has provided vital information from national and local records of medieval to modern date. This research has provided a clearer picture of property ownership and boundaries, social and religious history, and especially of the castle and phases of building works on it – though it is recognized that much remains to be discovered about the castle's medieval peak.[5]

The pilot work made it clearer than ever that scrutiny of this town site has much wider value. Despite long scholarly debate, it is evident that few *burhs* have been subject to detailed archaeological scrutiny – Northampton, Stafford, Winchester, Cricklade, Hereford and Bedford, as well as the classic case-study of *Lundenburh* are some of the few with any significant coverage, and few investigations within these are published in more than interim form. The recent major publication for Oxford, comprising compilation and re-analysis of varied excavations, including work on the river crossing, town defences, and housing, plus environmental reviews, is an excellent example of the potential of bringing together such scatterings of small- to medium-scale archaeological work to explore urban evolutions.[6] In addition, urban castle sites are rarely available for detailed study, thanks to material and structural loss, clearance work, or later development. Wallingford's castle site not only has a strong documentary record, but is also outstanding in both the size and level of survival of its multi-phase earthworks. This project at Wallingford therefore offers the opportunity to bring together not only older excavation data, but to introduce new, targeted work of various types to piece together for the first time a coherent image of a major Saxon *burh*, and a key royal medieval castle and attached townscape. We can tackle not just how the first, early medieval town was organised, but also see the manipulation of the site through Norman impositions, consider the economic, social, and material changes wrought by subsequent growth, and observe facets of urban change in the wake of decline in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

PROJECT METHODS AND RESULTS

This section outlines the various methodologies employed on the field project and briefly summarises some of the main results so far:

(i) *Geophysical Surveys*

The Project has, ambitiously, sought to generate sub-surface geophysical plots of all the large open spaces within and immediately adjacent to the historic urban core. Thus, resistivity and magnetometer surveys have been undertaken in the intramural Bullcroft, Kinecroft, and Thameside Mansions spaces; in the castle inner and outer baileys, plus Castle Meadows beyond, and alongside

---

[5] On the AHRC project's scope and objectives, see summary in O. Creighton, N. Christie, H. Hamerow, and M. Edgeworth, 'New Directions in Tracing the Origins and Development of Wallingford', in Keats-Rohan and Roffe, *Origins of the Borough of Wallingford*, pp. 68–76; N. Christie, M. Edgeworth, O. Creighton, and H. Hamerow, 'Wallingford: Charting Early Medieval and Medieval Expansion and Contraction', in *Medieval Settlement Research*, 23 (2009), pp. 53–7; plus the recent paper by O. Creighton, N. Christie, H. Hamerow, and M. Edgeworth, 'Wallingford', *British Archaeology*, 106 (May/June 2009), pp. 36–41. Papers in Keats-Rohan and Roffe, *Origins of the Borough of Wallingford* indicate some of the rich documentary records available for Wallingford; see also *VCH Berks*. 3 (online version accessible at http://www.british-history.ac.uk/Default.aspx).

[6] A. Dodd (ed.), *Oxford Before the University*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph, 17 (Oxford, 2003).

WALLINGFORD

Earthworks
Scheduled area
⊕ Church — extant
+ Church — site of

CASTLE MEADOWS

8 ■

4 ■

12 ■
10 ■

5 ■

BULLCROFT

9 ■

All
Hallows
+

14 ■

1 ■

Holy
Trinity
Priory
(site of)

16 ■
+ St Martin's
+ St Mary
the Less

⊕ St Peter's

Wallingford Bridge

+ St
Peter's

3 ■

13 ■

7 ■ ■ 6

St John's
+

2 ■

St Mary the More ⊕

KINECROFT

St Michael's
+
15 ■

11 ■

St Rumbold's
+

RIVERSIDE
MEADOWS

River Thames

Borough Boundary

St Leonard's ⊕

0   300m

St Lucian's
+

Burh to Borough Project excavations

1   Queen's Arbour (2003; 2010)
2   Riverside Meadows (2005)
3   Coach House (2005)
4   Castle Meadows (2008)
5   Bullcroft (2008)
6   Kinecroft (2008)
7   Kinecroft (2009)
8   School Field (2009)
9   Wallingford Castle (inner bailey) (2009)

10   Wallingford Castle (outer defences) (2010)

Other excavations

11   Anglo-Saxon cemetery (1930s)
12   Wallingford Castle (1965-8)
13   Kinecroft defences (1971)
14   Wallingford Castle (middle bailey) (1972)
15   St Michael's cemetery (1974)
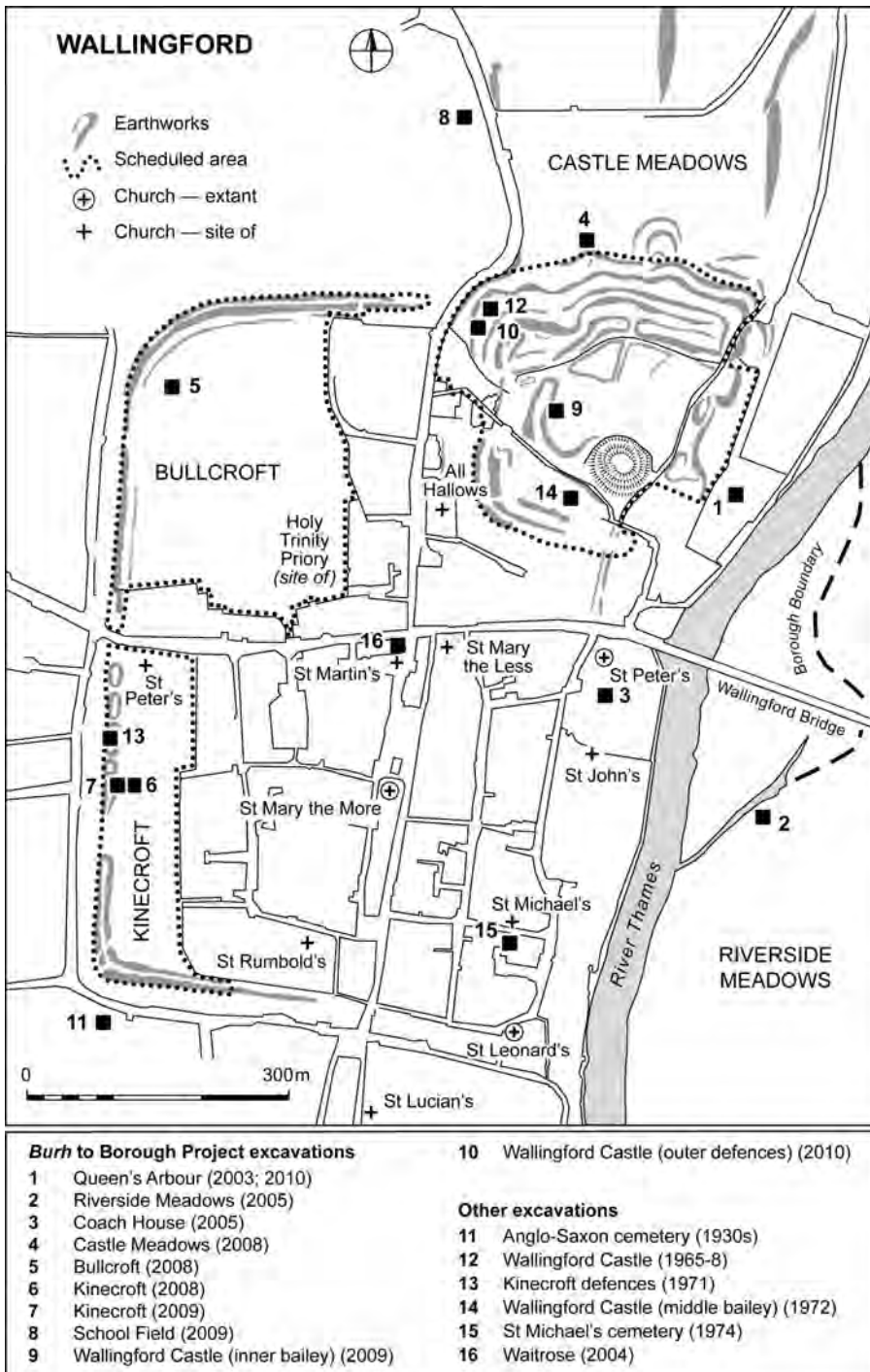16   Waitrose (2004)

Fig. 1. Plan of Wallingford's historic centre, plus the 'bridge-head' into Crowmarsh. The map identifies both the main previous investigations and the current project's work from 2003–10, plus the locations of extant and lost medieval churches, and the town's scheduled areas.
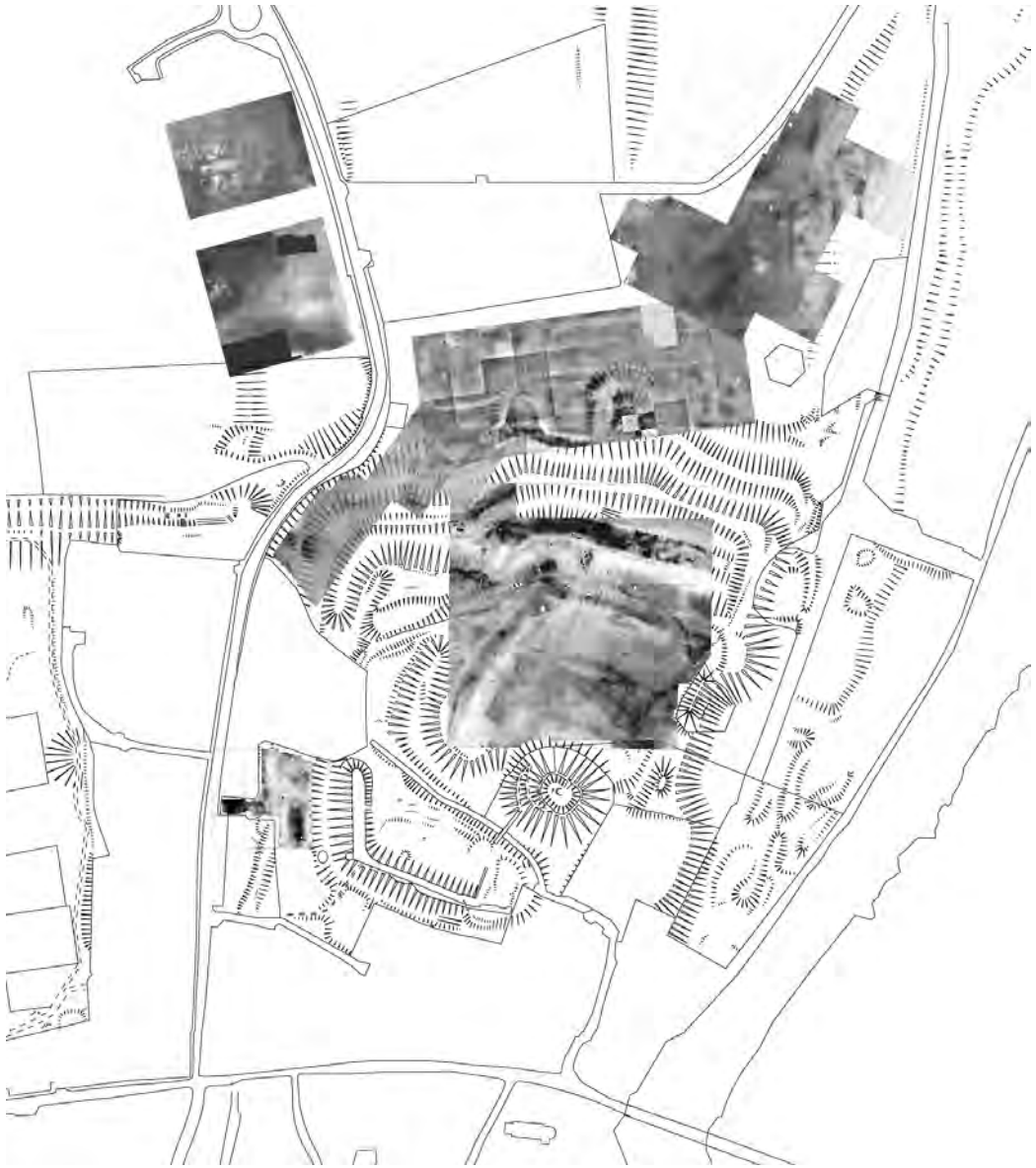
Fig. 2. Combined geophysical plots for Wallingford castle and Playing Fields zone, overlaid on a revised topographic earthwork survey for the northern portions of the town. The Bullcroft (north-west urban sector) and Queen's Arbour (flanking the river and east of the motte) have also been subject to full geophysical survey, but only the earthwork analysis is shown here.
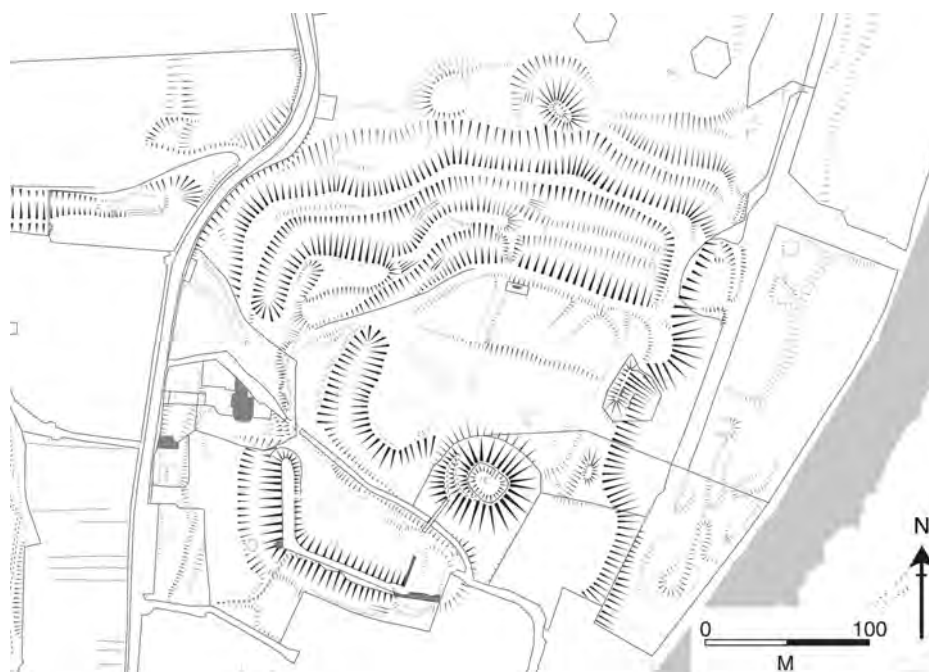
Fig. 3. Interpretative earthwork survey of Wallingford castle site by Michael Fradley.

the river at Queen's Arbour and King's Meadow; across the river inside the triangular extension to the town's boundary, incorporating the bridge, and ground to the south of this (Riverside Meadows); and in extramural spaces to the south at St John's Paddock/playing grounds and to the north at Wallingford School playing grounds. Work in 2010 included additional resistivity and magnetometer work on the Crowmarsh playing fields and nature area to the north and north-east of the bridge. Ground-Penetrating Radar work was undertaken in two targeted sections of the castle (inner bailey and the possible western barbican). The geophysical surveys, carried out with TWHAS teams, provided extensive and fairly rapid mapping and guided the selection of spaces for excavation for all seasons, with the trenches enabling better insights into the significance of the plots. In brief, useful and new results have included location of a possible (Anarchy period?) siege motte in Riverside Meadows; a quay or dam structure in Queen's Arbour east of the main castle, due to be explored in summer 2010 (a trench in 2003 identified this as a substantial west-east aligned medieval chalk-built structure, probably of thirteenth-century date); likely traces of the priory precinct wall and related fishponds in the Bullcroft; and a north-south medieval road (with undated antecedent) in Wallingford School grounds, with a sizeable quarry alongside it probably providing gravel for both road and castle building work.

(ii) *Earthwork Survey*

An important contribution to the project has been the deployment of an analytical earthwork survey methodology to capitalize on the extent of archaeo-topographical survival at Wallingford. One of the key areas in which this approach has succeeded is at the castle site, where it has enabled us to construct a more detailed understanding of the castle form and its phased development, including its post-medieval use during the Civil War and subsequent landscaping as an ornamental appendage to a succession of high-status properties. Additional fragments of the original *burh* defensive alignment have been identified which may significantly alter understanding of the overall late-Saxon perimeter. In the area east of the castle in the riverside zone a large pool and

other water management systems have been recorded which facilitated milling and the breeding of fish and fowl stocks which were important economic activities (as well as prominent symbols of social status) linked directly to the castle, while potential elements of an élite hunting preserve to the north are currently under investigation. One important question that remains to be resolved is the nature and scale of castle growth in the thirteenth century: a perimeter wall and fortified dam studded with circular towers has been surveyed on the north side, but it is currently uncertain whether this continued around the west and south sides of the castle. This is an area that was to be specifically targeted by fieldwork during the final 2010 summer season.

Investigations in the large areas beyond the extensive castle earthworks have also paid dividends. A range of features have been identified in the Kinecroft, although unfortunately these do not include anything that can be linked to medieval features excavated during the 2008–9 seasons (see below). Fragments of potential settlement enclosures have been recorded in the southern portion of this area, which appears to have been exposed to a different land management regime to the disturbed northern section, but the date and function of these features remain elusive without further fieldwork. The southern area of the Bullcroft is dominated by features almost certainly linked to the medieval Benedictine Priory and parish church of Holy Trinity, including a pond and a range of probable ancillary structures. By contrast, to the north there are simply the remains of ridge and furrow, with little suggestion that the priory complex or the wider settlement of Wallingford ever extended into this corner of the *burh* interior.

Effort has also been made to survey smaller available areas that have the potential to connect different datasets developed by the project. In a small area west of the castle, previously assumed to be the site of All Saints' Church, measured survey has in fact identified the hollow-way of the original north-south road through Wallingford prior to its shift westwards in the thirteenth century in response to the further expansion of Wallingford castle – an identification substantiated by further geophysical survey immediately to the north. Not only has the Church of All Saints' been 'lost' once more by this discovery, it has also enabled a thorough review of the original *burh* road layout. The traditional view of a neat grid layout is challenged by the discovery of these meandering roads within the town, their dates as yet uncertain, but which may in part predate the *burh*. This survey work is being augmented by basic plan analysis of the urban tenement plots which tentatively suggests that the primary east-west road through the town may have developed out of a large open drove-way which was gradually encroached upon and in-filled during the Middle Ages. To date the results of the analytical earthwork survey have been highly promising, but they are likely to yield further insights when analysed in conjunction with the results of other methodologies deployed by the Project.

(iii) *Excavations*

The park spaces of Wallingford provide scope for open-area excavation and the Project has enjoyed the high public profile of the trenches situated in the Kinecroft, Bullcroft, and castle zones. From the outset this has been a project with a strong local community involvement and engagement – tours, hand-outs, handling areas, notice boards, museum displays, open-days, web diaries/blogs, public talks and day conferences have been essential forms of communication; and many TWHAS members have dug, surveyed, finds processed, guided, and refreshed the team. The trenches (ten in all, with two programmed for 2010 – see Fig. 1) have been located to tackle specific questions about the urban and suburban spaces: in the Bullcroft, to consider what internal built features lay in the *burh* interior and alongside the rampart, and to identify land use under the Norman priory which occupied this quarter. Here results were in fact largely negative, showing no built units, no priory remains (these, much broken up at the dissolution, will have been located in the south end of the Bullcroft – see 'Test-Pitting', below), only agricultural and natural features – ridge and furrow and trees, perhaps part of the priory grounds. In the Kinecroft (Fig. 4), two trenches were dug to clarify the extent of pre- to post-Conquest medieval occupation in the south-west urban quarter, revealing houses and back/side plots, in each case identifying only limited duration

Fig. 4. View looking south of the excavations and recording in progress at the Kinecroft (trench 3) in 2008, uncovering a twelfth-century timber house. Excavations immediately west in 2009 (trench 6) uncovered pits, a midden, and ancillary building units.

of housing, including a beamslot-constructed house belonging mainly to the twelfth century.[7] In the castle area trenches have been sited firstly to confirm the form and date of a bastion on the northernmost defensive line of the castle (here revealing a Civil War emplacement overlying much made-up medieval ground), and secondly to explore a domestic or service structure within the western side of the inner bailey, here identifying extant walling (plus phases of wall-robbing) as well as likely kitchen waste of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but with later clearance and landscaping of the space. The material culture recovered from both castle and Kinecroft provides important handles on the local economy of the site and its study will enable better insight into whether castlefolk and townsfolk shared or differed in their tastes and access to resources and markets.

(iv) *Test-Pitting*

Despite such valuable open areas for study, it is clear that Wallingford's main residential and commercial zones were, and still are, centred on the main roads running north-south and west-east through the town (bar major nineteenth- and twentieth-century suburban expansion to the

---

7   On medieval house construction types see especially J. Munby, 'Medieval Domestic Buildings', in J. Schofield and R. Leech (eds.), *Urban Archaeology in Britain*, CBA Research Report, 61 (London, 1987), pp. 156–66, and J. Grenville, *Medieval Housing* (London, 1997).

west in particular). Accessing these prime spaces is problematic, but the Project is applying a programme of test-pitting in private gardens inside the town and suburbs to build up a rough picture of phases of use/inactivity, of activity type, disposal systems, materials used, depth of deposits, depth of natural, and forms of natural. With an end target of 100 test-pits (not all to be achieved in the time span of the current project, but viewed as part of an ongoing archaeological initiative now headed by TWHAS), thirty have so far been undertaken. The methodology is straightforward, but with some modifications to the system successfully applied in programmes carried out in rural contexts,[8] notably in having pits of 1.5 x 1.0 m, excavated to a maximum depth of 1.2 m. All soil is sieved from regular spits, and features noted and plotted; where natural is not reached, coring is undertaken.

It is too early to draw conclusions from the test-pitting thus far completed, as much material is still being processed for analysis, but the work has already given a useful picture of the varying underlying geology, has shown up fairly busy suburban activity to the immediate south of the town, and has helped trace a disturbed, but part in-situ medieval floor with fourteenth-century glazed tiles just north of the High Street at the south end of the Bullcroft quarter. The latter discovery should help identify at least one component of the lost Holy Trinity priory.

(v) *Buildings and Built Heritage*

Earlier publications, including the *Victoria County History*, have registered a high number of historic buildings – domestic, commercial (notably inns), religious, and industrial – in Wallingford, lying chiefly along the main north-south and west-east routes. These include the fine Flint House which hosts Wallingford Museum. While not core to our project, some examination of these buildings has been undertaken and work by the TWHAS documents group has shed light on their ownership history and boundaries. The majority are very late- or post-medieval in date, but some overlie medieval predecessors and one or two retain medieval undercrofts. The extant churches merit fuller study, notably St Leonard's which features herringbone work, plus early, likely Saxo-Norman, narrow windows. Recent renewals at the central market church of St Mary-le-More have meanwhile enabled Oxford Archaeology to examine the footings and other features revealed under the old church floor of the earliest medieval structure, although no secure dating has been obtained. As important, but equally understudied, is the distinctive bridge crossing westwards over the Thames from Crowmarsh (Plate 2). At nearly 300 m, it is just short of the length of London Bridge, and its fabric displays a complex history of renewal, expansion and rebuilding from *c*.1300–1900; Gothic vaulting is still evident, part encased in a widening of some of the central arches and piers. The river piers have undergone significant reworking following flood damage in the early nineteenth century. The bridge's angle of entry into the town and its relationship with the rebuilt church of St Michael's suggests complex change at this eastern 'gate': St Michael's was one of six churches positioned on or near the defences, and an intriguing possibility is that one or more represent the seats of Anglo-Saxon *thegns* (or aristocrats), as attested elsewhere.[9]

[8] Methods fully applied to good effect as part of the Whittlewood project and expanded by Carenza Lewis – see R. Jones and M. Page, *Medieval Villages in an English Landscape* (Macclesfield, 2006), and C. Lewis, 'New Avenues for the Investigation of Currently Occupied Medieval Rural Settlement: Preliminary Observations from the Higher Education Field Academy', *MedArch*, 51 (2007), pp. 133–63. Much similar fieldwork is reported in the journal and annual report of the *Medieval Settlement Research Group*, nos. 15–18.

[9] O.H. Creighton and R.A. Higham, *Medieval Town Walls: A Social History and Archaeology of Urban Defence* (Stroud, 2005), pp. 175–8.

QUESTIONS AND DEBATES

A series of wider questions can be framed and briefly commented upon here, identifying also how our fieldwork and research is assisting in answering or extending them:

(i) Burh *Origins and Roles*

Given the high density of later-Prehistoric, Roman, and Saxon activity in this specific Thames 'corridor', of particular interest is the question of urban roots: to what extent was the Alfredian town a virgin creation or one that evolved from an earlier focal point? How far can a secular or religious predecessor be inferred? And why was there no Roman site of note here? Apart from a later-Saxon tradition that Julius Caesar fought at the ford of Wallingford, and besides the efforts by Victorian Wallingfordian gentry to locate Roman *Calleva* here (an identification since, of course, 'usurped' by Silchester), no consistent evidence has yet emerged for a Roman Wallingford, bar occasional Roman pottery sherds, coins, and other portable objects, perhaps centred in the south and to the west of the town, and also in Crowmarsh (where late-Roman burials have also been found). These finds may be combined to signify small rural settlements adjacent to the Thames, perhaps indeed linked to the ford claimed to have been crossed by Caesar.[10] While there is no Roman road at this crossing – the known main Roman roads lie some way to the west and east, but both head northwards towards the late Iron-Age and Roman town of Dorchester – it would be unlikely that any ford or fords here would have been ignored and some connecting routeway probably passed through what were later to become Wallingford and Crowmarsh.[11] Dorchester's presence would have largely negated the need for a sizeable settlement here in any case, as traffic and markets would have gathered on this northerly neighbour.

Much more significant are the partially explored and plotted remains of a notable early Saxon cemetery of *c*.475–550, first identified in the later nineteenth century and with subsequent discoveries and partial excavations into the 1930s, set outside the area of the town's (later) south-west rampart, close to St John's school. The high number of sub-adults in this fairly well-to-do burial group (one of a number of early Saxon cemeteries in the region, the best known being that at Long Wittenham) must indicate a nearby adjoining settlement of uncertain size and duration.[12] Potentially a middle-Saxon site is to be expected in this area or that immediately to the east, where the lost St Lucian's church and the extant St Leonard's are located – one or other could relate to a monastic or manorial settlement, which might have given some impetus to the creation of the later *burh* here. Noticeably, the parish boundaries for St Leonard's (originally dedicated to Holy Trinity the less) and the lost intramural church of St Rumbold's both incorporate intra- and extra-mural space, cutting through the late-Saxon ramparts. Do these represent pre-*burh* ecclesiastical sites or land-units?[13] And did the builders of the *burh* rampart defences deliberately avoid the area of the earlier cemetery? As yet there is no archaeological evidence of any middle-Saxon activity, but it remains anticipated. There are indications, however, of some late-Saxon suburban activity in this zone, which contrast with the apparent absence of suburban features and activity, apart from quarrying, immediately north of the town.

[10]   Booth, 'Archaeology of the Wallingford Area', pp. 5–12.

[11]   A. Grayson, 'Thames Crossings near Wallingford from Roman to Early Norman Times', this volume, above.

[12]   On the cemetery, its discovery, and re-analysis of finds from it, see H. Hamerow with S. Westlake, 'The Early Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Wallingford', in Keats-Rohan and Roffe, *Origins of the Borough of Wallingford,* pp. 13–16; plus Booth, 'The Archaeology of the Wallingford Area', pp. 10–11 on early Saxon settlement and cemeteries.

[13]   On parishes and lost churches, see J. Dewey, 'The Origins of Wallingford: Topography, Boundaries and Parishes', in Keats-Rohan and Roffe, *Origins of the Borough of Wallingford,* pp. 17–26.

(ii) Burh *and Town Plan Evolution*

One aim of the Project was to consider how much of the Saxon and medieval town plan remains decipherable, how much has been lost, and how far archaeological work can fill in the gaps. These questions are central to deciphering the first plan of Wallingford. Given the substantial planned size of the site – at 2,400 hides matching the Wessex royal capital of Winchester – did the whole of the Alfredian *burh* bustle with activity? Were houses present across the urban space or just on the main thoroughfares? Or were open spaces – for market activity, troop mustering, stock keeping, or even cultivation – a core component of the whole? And what changes occurred in the town and its configuration with the Norman arrival and castle creation? Briefly, combining the evidence from retrogressive map analysis, new topographic survey, plus the geophysical and archaeological studies, we can recognize four main features of the town across the period 900–1300:

1. *Foundation:* The establishment of the *burh* enclosure in *c.*900 marks a major settlement statement, and although evidence of contemporary intramural activity is currently limited, the investment in space and defences is striking. There is also some evidence for a reworking of the landscape to accommodate the new foundation, such as modifying westerly and northern streams to fill the ditch and supply the town with water and milling, perhaps change to the river ford (a first timber bridge?), and likely change to pre-existing road lines from the north. A tantalising possibility also still exists of some form of high-status Anglo-Saxon occupation on the site that was to become the castle, while the likelihood of thegnly residences and estates centred on early churches might indicate another manifestation of authority within the *burh* plan.

2. *Expansion:* The eleventh century seems to mark a point of clear urban development and re-development both in the extent of occupation, of market activity, and in the number of churches, followed by the foundation of a castle and a small Benedictine priory after 1066.

3. *Fluctuation:* Excavation has demonstrated the short-lived expansion of settlement into part of the Kinecroft area by the twelfth century, although whether this was growth (economic and demographic) or localised migration caused by events such as the outward expansion of the castle cannot currently be verified. It will be useful to explore local rural trajectories in this same period.

4. *Stall:* The further development of the castle to a palatial level in the thirteenth century clearly contrasts with the urban settlement itself where evidence of selective abandonment becomes apparent, for instance on the west side of Castle Street, with little evidence of the contemporary expansion demonstrable at many other major urban centres in England. The absence of any settlements of friars in Wallingford is striking, for example. What remains to be determined is the period when some of the churches fell redundant and whether a pattern is evident in those that failed. How also did the rural hinterland respond to this 'stalling' in the economic fortunes of the town?

(iii) *Urban Shrinkage and Urban Space*

Quite probably, therefore, the medieval settlement of the Kinecroft area was short-lived, and the area reverted to the open space that seems to have existed here in the late-Saxon period – and which has prevailed to the present day, despite some housing encroachment on the south-eastern flank in the second half of the twentieth century. In the case of the Bullcroft further north, the open space is largely, it seems, a constant: we found no clear evidence for Saxon activity here apart from the ramparts themselves, nor medieval or later buildings; the traces of ridge and furrow instead indicate cultivation as at least one role the zone played, probably during the time of the priory and afterwards. The presence of trees would have been economically functional too,

providing firewood and other resources.[14] The dissolution of the priory in the sixteenth century then created additional open ground – probably unusable for some time given the evident rubble spread created. The name Kinecroft meanwhile points strongly to space employed for corralling and pasturing cattle; and while the suggestive name 'Bullcroft' is more recent, the medieval form was 'Bodecroft' or 'Bothecroft', suggesting booths for trading and, again, pointing to economic activity. We need also to consider whether or when the earth ramparts in both Bullcroft and Kinecroft were punctured by posterns and access lanes, as this may indicate the stage at which agricultural or economic use of these spaces superseded any practical maintenance of the ramparts as defences. The town still hosts fairs, 'bunkfests' (annual autumnal extravaganzas), and the like and these exploit the wide flat spaces to good effect; we should envisage that the Saxon to late-medieval periods also saw economic and social use of these areas. The loss of the houses in the Kinecroft might on the one hand denote 'urban shrinkage' or loss, but in reality, the intrusion or expansion of housing here was the unusual event.

On balance, the evidence from Wallingford points to the existence of a late-Saxon settlement that could be considered in any way 'urban' only in a relatively small area within the defences – the compact grid in the south-east corner. From the Thames the *burh* would have looked heavily settled, and the defences and gateways would have loomed over travellers and traders, but within the fortified zones were large unoccupied areas. But why construct such an expansive series of defences if the entire site was never to be occupied? Did Wallingford's costly and imposing defences represent, in effect, a façade? Crucially, open spaces within medieval towns need not signify evidence of settlement contraction, nor that a place failed to live up to its planned potential; many great medieval cities were full of gardens, precincts and other open spaces. At London, for example, archaeology is showing that *Lundenburh* was similarly a Thames-side intra-mural settlement, with expanses of fields between it and the ancient walls of *Londinium*.[15] Much of the area within the walls by *c*.900, indeed perhaps the majority of it, was open, while other zones quite separate from the *burh* had more specific high-status functions, including a likely Saxon palace and the ecclesiastical focus of St Paul's. Could the same be true of Wallingford, with the settled *burh* a limited venture, accompanied by semi-detached high-status and ecclesiastical foci? Open intra-mural areas could be integral to the functions of Anglo-Saxon centres, hosting fairs and providing areas for grazing, storage and the assembly of animals for market; they might comprise parts of aristocratic estates and periodically accommodate refugee populations and mustering armies. Indeed, it might be argued that intra-mural open zones were as important to the everyday functions of ninth- and tenth-century *burhs* as areas of recognisably 'urban' development.

(iv) *River Roles*

A final research question that has emerged relates to the role of the river Thames in the life cycle of historic Wallingford. The town's very origins (and name) relate to the water course, or at least a crossing over it; the same is true of the creation of the royal castle. The waterway was a chief means of access for visiting royalty and gave scope for the town's economic growth; the investment in the bridge as a built structure is evident from the twelfth century onward (and bridge and Thames played, as noted, an important role in protecting the town and castle during the Anarchy). Paradoxically, of course, with the dissolution and the later Civil War, the waterway was the route by which much of the material from the priory and castle demolitions was shifted away. More attention needs to go into exploring economic changes prompted by investment in

---

[14]   For orchards and trees in monastic precincts supplying timber, faggots, firewood, and woodchips, and open and cultivated urban spaces more generally see C. Noble, C.O. Moreton, and P. Rutledge (eds.), *Farming and Gardening in Late Medieval Norfolk*, Norfolk Record Society, 61 (Norwich, 1996).

[15]   On this late-Saxon London evidence see G. Milne, *Excavations at Medieval Cripplegate. Archaeology after the Blitz, 1946–68* (London, 2001), pp. 120–2. An excellent analysis of the riverside developments and the city's bridges is idem, *The Port of Medieval London* (Stroud, 2003), chapters 3–5.

bridges and canals elsewhere on the Thames, such as at Abingdon to the north:[16] was river trade at and through Wallingford much damaged by this or do these other works reflect a decline already affecting Wallingford? Far more study needs to be invested in both water and bridge: for example, Reading Museum's River Collection includes many Prehistoric to medieval items found at or near Wallingford bridge during river dredging, including bronze axes, daggers, iron swords, spearheads, and a skull. How do these relate to the crossing and to trade? How far to ritual activity? How far to battles fought, merchants mugged, or possessions dropped? And what do they tell us about the town's visitors and residents? The river is just one component of the 'waterscapes' of Wallingford: we know from the documents for the castle also of dams, swanneries, water mills, and moats (and can now confidently recognize these from the analytical earthwork survey); the town defences similarly required flowing water for their ditches, and water was essential for town inhabitants' consumption, trade, and craft work. We may not be able to identify many of these hidden yet essential features, but recognize the need to flag and debate their presence and roles in Saxon to modern Wallingford.

CONCLUSION

A major insight to emerge from the investigations described above is the sheer complexity of settlement and castle evolution in the periods studied. So far this article has referred to Wallingford as a single site or entity, which in an important sense it is. Yet the *burh* or borough also represents a multiplicity of smaller sites, each the outcome of numerous events and processes, and sub-divisible into multiple phases and sequences. To tie all these together, without closing down the range of possible interpretations into deceptively simple single explanations, is a considerable challenge. As a partial microcosm of developments over a much wider area, Wallingford provides evidence which can be used to address many significant questions about urban growth and decline in the late-Saxon and medieval periods.[17] Excavations and surveys in the town, while clarifying our picture of the past in some respects, have at the same added to the intricacy of the patterns to be explained. In locating our trenches to answer specific questions, many other questions have naturally arisen. The *Wallingford* Burh *to Borough Project* will go some way towards pulling the threads together, but one thing is certain: the incredibly rich heritage of Wallingford will keep archaeologists (and historians) busy for many years to come.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

[16] Water and bridges are covered well in J. Blair, *Waterways and Canal-Buildings in Medieval England* (Oxford, 2007), and in D. Harrison, *The Bridges of Medieval England* (Oxford, 2004). We will discuss the Wallingford bridge and watercourse in a separate paper and at length in the project monograph, but we would argue that construction of the stone bridge at Abingdon in 1416 came long after Wallingford had fallen into economic decline.

[17] A key contextualisation is offered by G. Astill, 'Community, Identity and the Later Anglo-Saxon Town: the Case of Southern England', in W. Davies, G. Halsall, and A. Reynolds (eds.), *People and Space in the Middle Ages, 300–1300* (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 231–52.

Plate 1. Aerial view of Wallingford and the part-flooded Thames (north to the right). The earthworks of both *burh*/town defences (top centre) and castle (bottom right) stand out clearly. Photo courtesy of the Environment Agency. [Christie, p. 36]

Plate 2. View looking west across the Thames: the spire of St Michael's Church is to the left (this a post-Civil War rebuild), and Wallingford bridge to the right. Only part of the bridge stands in the river itself; the stonework reveals multiple phases of building and repair. [Christie, p. 43]