The Western Approach to Anglo-Saxon Oxford

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SUMMARY

This article looks at evidence for an important early approach to Oxford from the west, from the 'ox ford' near North Hinksey, mentioned in the fourteenth century, into the west side of the Anglo-Saxon town. It delineates a route very different to that shown on post-medieval maps, and challenges several assumptions about the pre-Conquest topography of west Oxford. This new interpretation suggests that the long-established model which saw the Anglo-Saxon town developing from an original settlement near the Thames crossing on the south should be reconsidered. The recent discovery of an ancient metalled track at North Hinksey has lent support to the argument that the western approach to Oxford was important.

The process of composing maps of early Oxford for a forthcoming volume of the *Historic Towns Atlas* has led to a review of the puzzling evidence for the town's origins and early development. Constructed maps can be misleading, somehow acquiring spurious authority by translating tentative hypotheses into hard and fast lines. Yet to insist on absolute certainty before mapping early Oxford would result in a largely blank page: clearly lines must be drawn, but only after a careful, perhaps cynical, look at existing assumptions.

Oxford has been the subject of intensive archaeological investigation from the late 1960s, much of it directed towards testing key hypotheses derived from documentary and above-ground evidence: (1) that the walled area of the town was created around 900 AD as a fortified *burh* on the edge of an existing settlement called Oxford; (2) that Oxford had developed around a north–south route fording the River Thames near Folly Bridge; (3) that a key element in the pre-*burh* settlement was an early minster, St Frideswide's, located near this southern ford. During the 1970s, whilst preparing the VCH *City of Oxford* volume, the present writer was much involved in the development of these key hypotheses, which by 1979, when the volume was published, had become something of a consensus.[1] In 2003 Anne Dodd's *Oxford Before the University,* summarising a half century of painstaking archaeological investigation and documentary analysis, found that the chief tenets of the 1970s consensus were still in place, although mostly unconfirmed.[2] The well-known limitations of urban archaeology (piecemeal accessibility, tightly restricted sites, paucity of reliable dating evidence, inadequate reporting of finds) all had contributed to the continuing uncertainty. Discoveries since 2003, notably on the castle site, have introduced a few new ideas,[3] but assumptions about Oxford's origins are still based on the established model.

This article challenges the long-held conviction that the main, perhaps the only approach to pre-Conquest Oxford was from the south, along the line of the later Abingdon Road. So entrenched was this idea that the sub-title of Anne Dodd's book refers simply to *the* Thames Crossing, a phrase used as early as 1984 in the title of an article by Brian Durham treating the archaeology of St Aldate's Street.[4] In 1973 R.H.C. Davis published a seminal article,[5]

1 *VCH Oxon.* 4, pp. 3–9.

2 A. Dodd (ed.), *Oxford Before the University* (2003), pp. 13–32 and *passim.*

3 D. Poore et al., 'Excavations at Oxford Castle', *Oxoniensia*, 74 (2009), pp. 1–18.

4 B. Durham, 'The Thames Crossing at Oxford: Archaeological Studies 1979–82', *Oxoniensia*, 49 (1984), pp. 57–100.

5 R.H.C. Davis, 'The Ford, the River, and the City', *Oxoniensia*, 38 (1973), pp. 258–67.

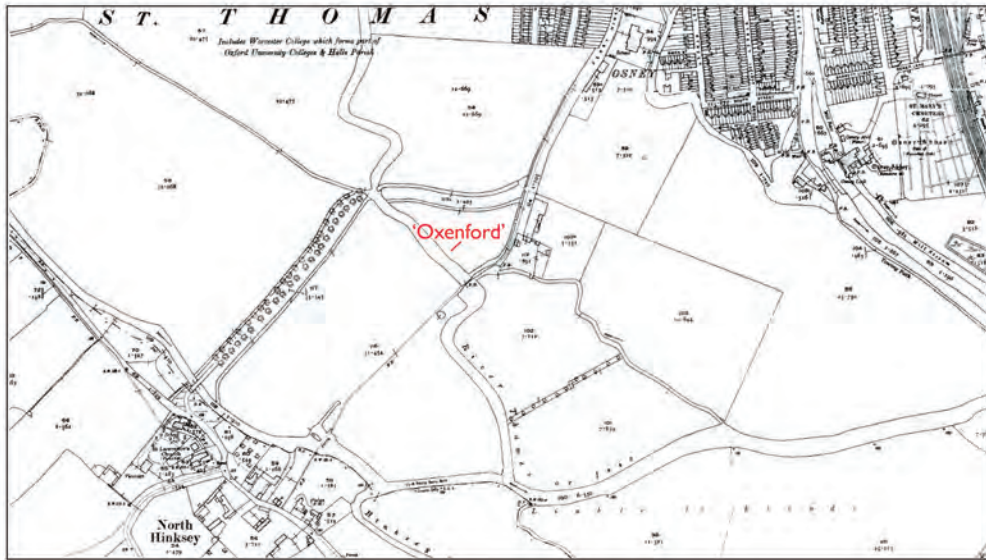

Fig. 1. Approximate site of 'Oxenford' on the Bulstake Stream, mentioned in 1352 (OS map, 1921). © An Edina supplied mapping service.

arguing that the Thames crossing at which Oxford was established must have been on a north–south route, and he reinforced a suggestion, made by Gabrielle Lambrick in 1969,[6] that there was probably a fordable route southwards, island-hopping along a gravel spit on the line of Abingdon Road, long before the Norman creation of a stone causeway there. Davis and others who saw d'Oilly's stone causeway as confirmation of the pre-eminence of the southern approach to the Anglo-Saxon town were obliged to argue that the 'ox ford' from which the town was named must have been on that route. In 1928, however, H.E. Salter had already located an eponymous ford on the west side of the town:[7] he cites a document of 1352 concerning a small meadow west of Osney, bounded on the south by a ford called 'Oxenford' near 'the bridge leading towards North Hinksey' from Bulstake (later Osney) Mead.[8] This easily identifiable spot (Fig. 1) was mentioned again in 1376 in a boundary dispute between the town and Osney abbey, the townsmen arguing that, since this 'Oxenford' had given the town its name, the land between it and the town (Osney Island) must belong to them.[9] Davis's suggestion that the townsmen perhaps invented the ford's name is unacceptable, not only because of the earlier reference, but also because (as Davis well knew) every statement in medieval litigation would be routinely challenged, and the townsmen would hardly have risked immediate rebuttal by anyone with local knowledge. Significantly the abbot of Osney disputed neither the location of the ford, nor the alleged derivation of the town's name, but made what was for him the crucial point – that this ford lay in Northgate hundred, not within the franchise of the town. So we may deduce with some confidence (as Salter did) that in the later fourteenth century there was only one ford called 'Oxenford', which was still important enough (it was by then bridged) for locals to believe that the town may have been named from it.

Despite the facts that Oxford's earliest recorded bridge (in 1004) was on the east, on or near the site of Magdalen Bridge, and much of the earliest discovered pottery came from the east

6 G. Lambrick, 'Some Old Roads of North Berkshire', *Oxoniensia,* 34 (1969), pp. 82–3.
7 H.E. Salter, 'The Ford of Oxford', *Antiquity*, 2 (1928), pp. 458–60.
8 Idem (ed.), *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, 6 vols., OHS 89–91, 97–8, 101 (1929–36), vol. 2, pp. 161–2.
9 Idem (ed.), *Medieval Archives of the University of Oxford*, 2 vols., OHS 70, 73 (1917, 1919), vol. 1, p. 200.

of England,[10] Davis is adamant that the town must have been established on a north–south route. He reminds us that travellers crossing England from west to east could easily pass north or south of the Thames, so it was hardly likely that Salter's suggested ford on the west could have been important. He ignores evidence (discussed below) that many early travellers from west and east did not bypass the Oxford area but came specifically to it. Nor does he consider that travellers from the south might still cross the meandering Thames from west to east if the best crossing place happened to be on a north–south reach. Finally, in rebutting Salter's speculations about possible early routes to Oxford from both west and south, Davis relies on evidence about traffic from a period after the building of Grandpont causeway,[11] which is therefore irrelevant to Anglo-Saxon conditions. For no-one doubts that, after Grandpont was built, a route into Oxford's west side would have become much less important, which is perhaps why the medieval western approach is so difficult to trace.

Davis was thought to have 'convincingly refuted' Salter's argument for an important western approach to Anglo-Saxon Oxford,[12] and most subsequent research concentrated almost exclusively on the south side of the town. Yet even the most committed supporter of Davis's hypothesis of a southern 'ox ford' must admit that archaeological investigation has failed to produce confirmation. Certainly there was mid Anglo-Saxon activity on the southern edge of the gravel terrace; there were many early burials in the St Aldate's area; a clay bank was identified as possibly part of a constructed causeway, although thought later to be a natural deposit; post-holes, perhaps indicating a timber bridge, and what may have been an abandoned early ford were found at the south end of St. Aldates Street on the line of the suggested crossing.[13] Again, no-one doubts that there would have been some sort of river-crossing towards the Wyke farms immediately south of the town,[14] but as yet there is no evidence for a continuous 'island hopping' Anglo-Saxon route across the flood plain along the length of the Abingdon Road. The causeway attributed to Robert d'Oilly seems indeed to have been built after the Conquest, [15] and although Davis's hypothesis of linked fords remains perfectly plausible, it should not be allowed, merely through repetition, to harden into a fact. Unproven certainty about *the* Thames crossing has bolstered other hypotheses, notably that there was an early minster on the site of the later cathedral; here the circular argument has been that an important river-crossing was an obvious location for a minster, and that the siting of a minster confirms the importance of the crossing.

A conviction that the very next excavation would clinch all argument over the southern approach seems to have closed minds to obvious questions: why, for instance, did d'Oilly place his castle on the west side of Oxford if the main Thames crossing was on the south? Again, when the spade turned up things which did not to fit the established model, no adjustments were made: so the discovery beneath Church Street, St Ebbe's, of a substantial north–south ditch apparently defending something on its west (not east) side did not alter the model which had placed the core of mid Anglo-Saxon settlement to the east.[16] More surprising still was the failure to react to a remarkable discovery on the west side of the town (Fig. 2). In 1970, beneath the medieval Castle Street near its junction with Queen Street (under the modern Bonn Square), excavations revealed eighteen successive surfaces on a street over thirty feet

[10] Dodd, *Oxford Before the University,* pp. 17, 301.

[11] Lambrick, 'Old Roads of North Berkshire', pp. 78–92.

[12] Dodd, *Oxford Before the University*, p. 5.

[13] All this is summarised in ibid. pp. 12–19.

[14] Lambrick, 'Old Roads of North Berkshire', p. 83. East and West Wyke, two early medieval farms on either side of Abingdon Road, were probably Anglo-Saxon settlements: *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 283.

[15] Lambrick, 'Old Roads of North Berkshire', p. 83; Durham, 'The Thames Crossing', pp. 57–100; Dodd, *Oxford Before the University*, pp. 53–4.

[16] T.G. Hassall et al., 'Excavations in St. Ebbe's, Oxford, 1967–76: Part I', *Oxoniensia*, 54 (1989), pp. 106–8. Despite the evidence in that article it was still suggested that the ditch might be protecting a minster precinct on the east: J. Blair, 'St. Frideswide's Monastery: Problems and Possibilities', *Oxoniensia*, 53 (1988), p. 235.

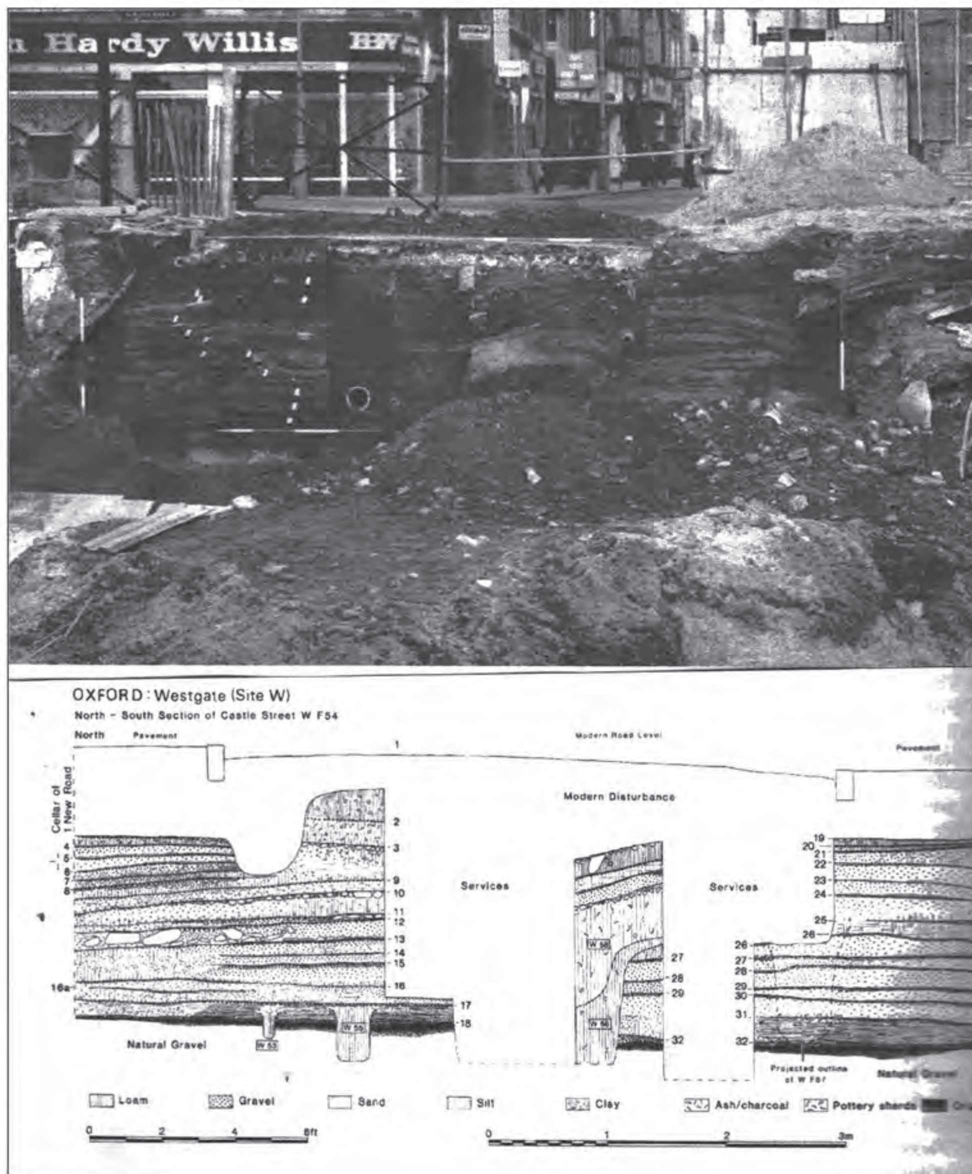

Fig. 2. Early street surfaces at the top of the former Castle Street, Oxford, looking east along Queen Street. First published in T. Hassall et al., 'Excavations in Oxford, 1967–76', Oxoniensia, *54 (1989), plate 23, fig. 20.*

wide, with pottery finds indicating a late Anglo-Saxon date for the fifteen lowest surfaces.[17] If, as seems likely, the primary surface here was of the same date as the *burh* of *c.*900, this would imply that a street bringing traffic into the Anglo-Saxon town from the west was resurfaced every ten years or so. No other discovered early street surfaces in Oxford have shown remotely

[17] Hassall et al., 'Excavations in St. Ebbe's, Part I', pp. 124–5, figs. 17–18, 20.

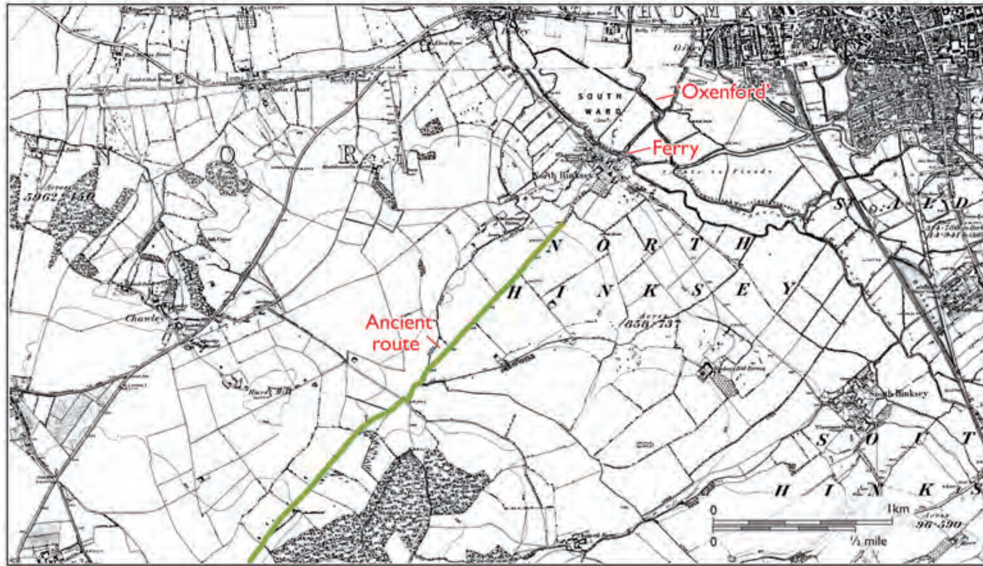

Fig. 3. Ancient route from the south-west towards Hinksey ferry and 'Oxenford' (OS map, 1886). © An Edina supplied mapping service.

comparable wear.[18] This Castle Street excavation was not fully reported until 1989, and neither then nor later were its implications discussed. A review of the evidence for a western approach to Anglo-Saxon Oxford is long overdue.

Beyond Hinksey Hill, west of Oxford, ancient roads converged on Besselsleigh: a Roman road came from the Wantage area in the south through Frilford, and a prehistoric ridgeway, also probably used by the Romans, ran towards Besselsleigh from the Swindon area through Faringdon.[19] It is possible, on the ground and on maps (Fig. 3), to trace an ancient track descending from Besselsleigh in a north-easterly direction to North Hinksey, the site of an ancient ferry over a branch of the River Thames (the Seacourt or Hinksey Stream). The track, visible in winter in Raleigh Park, is reported to be metalled.[20] Ferries such as that at Hinksey were coveted medieval franchises, and are almost invariably a sign of ancient river crossings. So there can be little doubt that this route was an important ancient approach towards the site of what became Oxford.

A few hundred yards north-east of the Hinksey ferry, on the Bulstake Stream, was the 'Oxenford' identified by Salter, approached in the nineteenth century along what appears to have been a raised causeway flanked by ditches (Fig. 4). Recent excavations found no early evidence on this line, but in the field to the north-west were the remains of an ancient metalled track. Medieval horseshoes were found, and wheel ruts on the surface, orientated south-west to north-east, suggest that the medieval (or earlier) crossings of the Hinksey and Bulstake channels were further upstream than previously thought.[21] The Bulstake Stream was probably the main stream of the Thames in Anglo-Saxon times, since it became the county

[18] For street surface observations to 2003 see Dodd, *Oxford Before the University*, pp. 258–70. Archaeologists warn that the surfaces may have been corrupted, but seem to agree, sometimes reluctantly, that the interpretation given here is permissible.

[19] H.E. Salter, *Medieval Oxford* (1936), pp. 2–3; M. Henig and P. Booth, *Roman Oxfordshire* (2000), p. 50; D. Sturdy, *Historic Oxford* (2004), fig. 7.

[20] Information from the Friends of Raleigh Park, particularly Dr D.R. Brown.

[21] T. Black et al., 'Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme, Archaeological Evaluation', unpubl. Oxford Archaeology report, February, 2018.

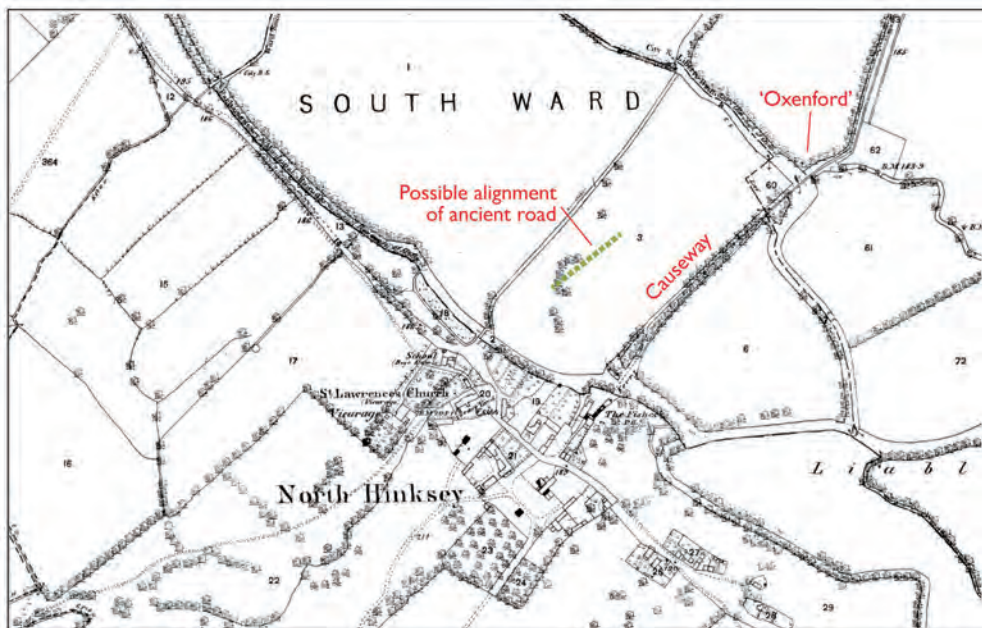

Fig. 4. The causeway from Hinksey ferry towards 'Oxenford' in the nineteenth century (OS map, 1876). © An Edina supplied mapping service.

boundary. A suggestion that its name may derive from some sacrificial ritual associated with river-crossings may be fanciful, but Bronze-Age, Iron-Age, and Anglo-Saxon weapons found in the Minster Ditch, North Hinksey, confirm the prolonged importance of river-crossings in this area.[22] Since 'Oxenford' was on a major, not a minor, stream it was clearly an important crossing, so we should perhaps not share Davis's scepticism that its name could have been taken by a nearby early settlement.

Oddly, even the few scholars who recognized that an ancient route came from the west to 'Oxenford' gave little serious thought to where it went next. Rulers were laid on maps and straight Roman roads drawn from Hinksey to various sites in North Oxford, crossing multiple river channels at arbitrary and unlikely points, regardless of topographical constraints:[23] these impossible speculations need not detain us. Salter, suggesting a possible route from Hinksey, admitted that 'the Britons or Anglo-Saxons might have chosen a better spot. Four branches of the river have to be crossed by this way: first the stream where is, and always was, a ferry; then the ford called Oxford; next the ford called Wereford where Osney [abbey] built a bridge soon after 1200, and lastly the ford below the Castle mill'.[24] It is a pity that Salter, with his matchless knowledge of Oxford's topographical sources, never came to review this casual sketch of an improbably indirect route, for it contains, as discussed below, the germ of an idea that would have transformed his view of the west side of the medieval town.

Wood, Hurst, Salter, and all others attempting to reconstruct Oxford's medieval topography were familiar with, and relied heavily upon, Ralph Agas's map of 1578.[25] The exercise of transferring Agas's lines onto a digitised OS base (for the forthcoming *Historic Towns Atlas*) has

22 Sturdy, *Historic Oxford*, p. 7.
23 Ibid. p. 18; Henig and Booth, *Roman Oxfordshire*, p. 50, fig. 7.1; Dodd, *Oxford Before the University*, fig. 2.1.
24 Salter, 'The Ford of Oxford', p. 460.
25 The original map is in the Bodleian Library. For a reproduction, and also for Whittlesey's engraving of 1728, which supplies missing details, see *Old Plans of Oxford*, OHS 38 (1899).

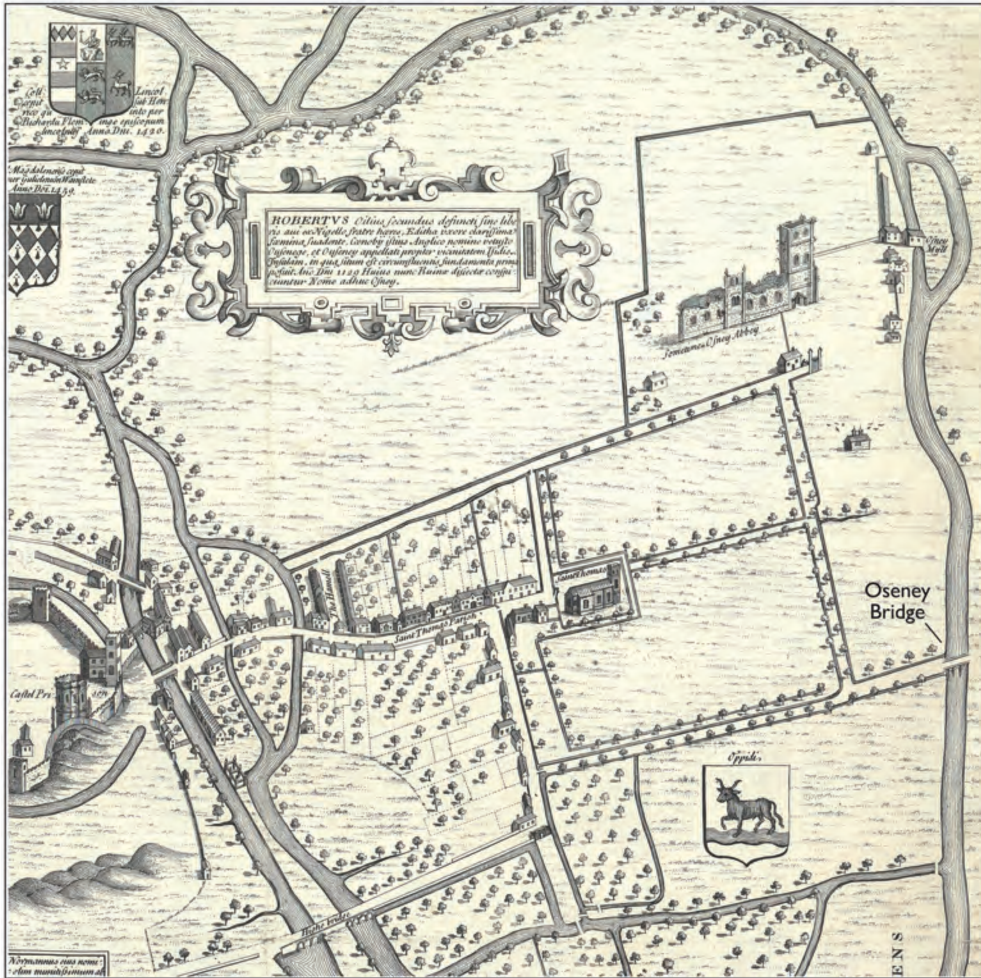

Fig. 5. The streets of St Thomas's parish in Ralph Agas's map of Oxford, 1578. South is at the top.

confirmed the map's essential accuracy: apparently insignificant lines on peripheral areas may be traced through successive later maps to surviving features on the ground. Although Agas post-dated some important early sixteenth-century changes in Oxford's topography his map remains a crucial source for understanding the layout of the earlier, medieval, town. His depiction of the streets in St Thomas's parish (Fig. 5) raises an important, and hitherto unconsidered, question: for he shows that in 1578 the only route into the town from the west crossed Osney Bridge, then made a right-angle turn left or right into Hollybush Row, then a further right-angle turn into either Hythe Bridge Street or St Thomas's High Street to reach bridges over the Castle mill stream. Surely the zig-zag route shown by Agas must have been preceded by a more direct, ancient route? Implicit in most discussions of the medieval castle area has been a vague notion that the way out to the west passed St George's Tower into St Thomas's High Street, but no thought has been given to where it went next. Constructed maps of early medieval Oxford have simply tacked Agas's sixteenth-century streets onto the west side of the walled town.[26]

[26] T.H. Aston et al. (eds.), *History of the University of Oxford*, 8 vols. (1984–94), vol. 2, maps 2, 3.

In fact the short section of road between Osney Bridge and Hollybush Row was a post-Conquest creation. In *c.*1210 Osney abbey was granted two selions of land in the manor of North Osney to make a causeway and road along the boundary of its existing estate to a ford called Wereford, evidently the site of the later Osney Bridge.[27] Salter saw this Wereford as a point on his suggested route from 'Oxenford' to the Anglo-Saxon town, but that seems most unlikely: had it been so, the street pattern in St Thomas's parish would surely have developed very differently, with some direct route from Wereford into town rather than the right-angle turns shown by Agas. Even after the causeway was built in the early thirteenth century the Wereford (Osney Bridge) route seems to have remained unimportant, its chief traffic presumably local, to and from the western meadows and Binsey. When in the fifteenth century it finally became the main, or only, route into Oxford from the west, it was too late to affect the street plan shown by Agas. Indeed it was not until the late eighteenth century that a direct link between Osney Bridge and the town centre was created, with the building of New Road, Pacey's Bridge, and Park End Street.

Of the streets shown by Agas in this area only St Thomas's High Street has the look of a natural ancient route. Could this street be part of the Anglo-Saxon western approach? There are several reasons for ruling that out. Archaeological excavations of buildings at its eastern end strongly suggest that the street was a suburban extension, post-dating the foundation of Osney abbey in 1129.[28] Its west end was closed by the building of St Thomas's church in the late twelfth century[29] and on Agas's map the position of the church and its large, square churchyard strongly suggest that St Thomas's High Street had always terminated there. The churchyard does not look like an island site, and it seems unlikely that the medieval street bypassed it on the way to a ford west of the church. Had there been an ancient ford at that point Osney abbey would hardly have chosen to build the Wereford causeway some hundred metres upstream.

The location of Castle mill at the other (east) end of St Thomas's High Street presents another problem for those who have 'always thought' that the street was the western route to and from the Anglo-Saxon town. Domesday Book records an Oxford mill, held before the Conquest by Earl Aelfgar of Mercia, and thereafter the most important mill in town, a royal mill;[30] beyond reasonable doubt this was Castle mill, and it is likely that the major engineering feat of digging the long mill-leet was carried out in Anglo-Saxon times, probably as a royal undertaking. The point about its location is this: if there had been an ancient ford over the river near St George's Tower the building of the mill-leet would have destroyed it; if there was already a bridge there it would have needed total reconstruction. Why would a mill engineer not do the simple thing – build his mill upstream of the ford (as, incidentally, seems to have been the practice with early mills all over England). Yet commentators on the castle area have consistently assumed that there was an early river-crossing at or upstream of St George's Tower, failing to recognise the significance of the mill's location.[31] Only Salter seems to have considered a crossing-place further downstream, referring casually in 1928 to 'the ford *below* Castle mill'.[32] Although local archaeologists seem to agree in principle with my argument about the likely relationship of fords and mills,[33] they are unwilling to give up their belief

27 Salter, *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, vol.2, pp. 442–3. The 'existing estate' was a 17½-acre piece north of the abbey precinct, granted by Bernard de St. Valery in the 1180s: ibid. pp. 432–3. For its location see N. Palmer, 'A Beaker Burial and Medieval Tenements in the Hamel, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, 45 (1980), p. 137 and fig. 4.

28 Palmer, 'A Beaker Burial', pp. 135–8.

29 *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 403.

30 For the mill see ibid. pp. 328–9.

31 T.G. Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford Castle, 1965–73', *Oxoniensia*, 41 (1976), p. 242; D. Poore et al., 'Excavations at Oxford Castle', *Oxoniensia*, 74 (2009), p. 8 and figs. 2, 4.

32 Salter, 'The Ford of Oxford', p. 460.

33 There seems to have been no general study of the relationship of watermills to ancient fords. Brian Durham estimates that the creation of a reasonable head of water for an undershot vertical-wheeled mill would 'drown' any pre-existing ford for perhaps a kilometre upstream.

in an Anglo-Saxon river-crossing at St George's Tower. They must therefore explain why, if such an ancient crossing did exist, it left no trace in the known street pattern of St Thomas's parish. Even after the mill-leet was bridged, probably by the late twelfth century,[34] no direct connection with Osney Bridge or any other river-crossing seems to have developed.

Neither of the other two main streets in St Thomas's parish in 1578 seem likely to have preserved the line of an ancient route. Hythe Bridge Street, not connecting directly with Osney Bridge and with no sign of medieval housing, was probably laid out in the thirteenth century: Rewley abbey, to which it gave access, was founded in 1280.[35] Osney Lane, another straight, unoccupied street on Agas's map looks very much like an access road post-dating Osney abbey (1129); on Agas's map it looks like a back lane running behind the probably twelfth-century plots on the south side of St Thomas's High Street,[36] before turning through the Hamel to cross over Quaking Bridge. Its straightness, however, has encouraged speculation that it may have been Roman, presumably crossing the river and mill-stream just south of Castle mill.[37] Such a crossing point seems unlikely, given the caveat about the mill's location discussed above. If there had indeed been such a crossing, then why build a bridge a few metres upstream, at the east end of St Thomas's High Street? And is it conceivable that a twelfth-century suburb developed on the curving High Street, alongside and a few metres north of an existing Roman road, leaving that road totally unoccupied? Further, if Osney Lane did not terminate at the abbey's great gate (as shown by Agas) but continued west to a river-crossing, then surely Osney mill would not have been placed a few metres downstream (for the reasons already discussed). And if a Roman road had indeed crossed the river upsteam of Osney mill, then road developments over Osney Mead further west (discussed below) would have been very different.

Nothing has yet been discovered about early routes east of 'Oxenford': the earliest maps of the extensive meadows west of Osney are nineteenth century,[38] and by then field boundaries offer no hints of former roads. Early twentieth-century air photographs are similarly unhelpful, and the later establishment of Osney Mead Industrial Estate covered most of the area with concrete, impenetrable by Lidar technology. One document, however, provides a clue to the possible line of a road eastward from Hinksey ferry. In 1467 the owner of the ferry was granted land and permission by Osney abbey to construct a causeway across Osney mead from 'King's swathe' in the south (near 'Oxenford') to a join an existing road on the north, near a stone causeway west of Osney Bridge.[39] The line of the ferryman's causeway may safely be identified with that of the surviving Ferry Hinksey Road (Fig. 6), which runs south-westwards from Botley Road towards the site of 'Oxenford'.[40] The ferryman's new causeway connected with the Osney Bridge road near the present St Frideswide's Bridge; a road from Binsey also came in at that point from the north-west (Fig. 7) and by then there may also have been a usable route from the west on the line of Botley Road, long before John Claymond's well-documented improvements in the sixteenth century.[41]

The most plausible interpretation of the 1467 agreement is that the ferryman's ambitious new causeway was an attempt to recover lost business. Presumably the route over Osney Bridge was attracting travellers away from some old route over Hinksey ferry, but whether this change was caused by improvement to the one route or by decay of the other is not known.

[34] Quaking Bridge is mentioned by name in the late thirteenth century: *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 289.
[35] Palmer, 'A Beaker Burial', p. 138; *VCH Oxon*. 2, pp. 81–2.
[36] Palmer, 'A Beaker Burial', pp. 137, 208.
[37] Agas shows a residual path to the river at the east end of Osney Lane, from the turn into the Hamel.
[38] For example, OHC, tithe map 300 (St Thomas's parish).
[39] Salter, *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, vol.2, pp. 443–4.
[40] Before inclosure of the meadows in 1853 the north end of the causeway joined the Botley Road immediately next to the present St. Frideswide's Bridge: OHC, QS/D/A/book 11; cf. map of 1848 in Salter, *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, vol.2, facing p. 634.
[41] *VCH Oxon*. 4, pp. 284, 288; Salter, *Medieval Oxford*, p. 1.

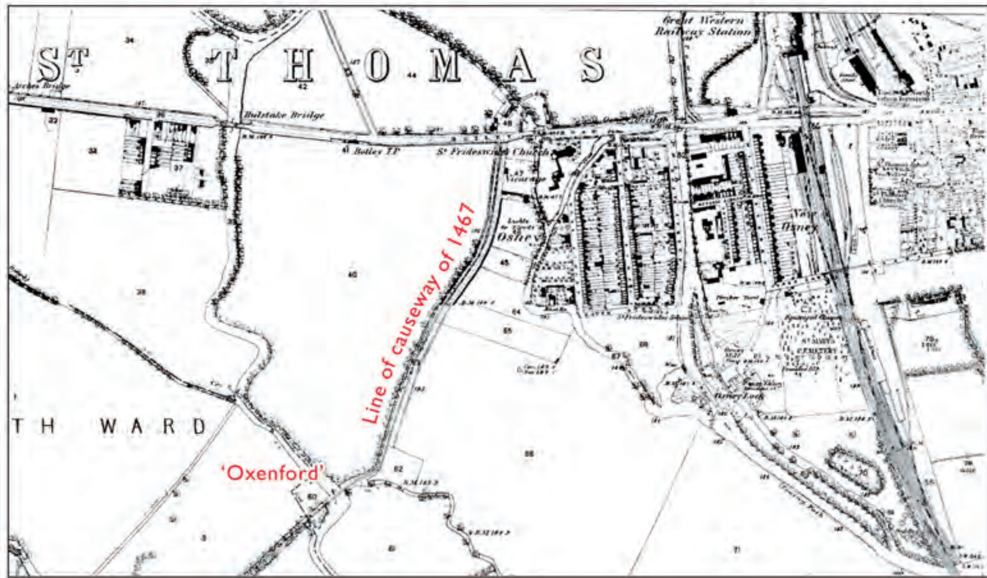

Fig. 6. The ferryman's fifteenth-century causeway, later Ferry Hinksey Road (OS map, 1876). © An Edina supplied mapping service.

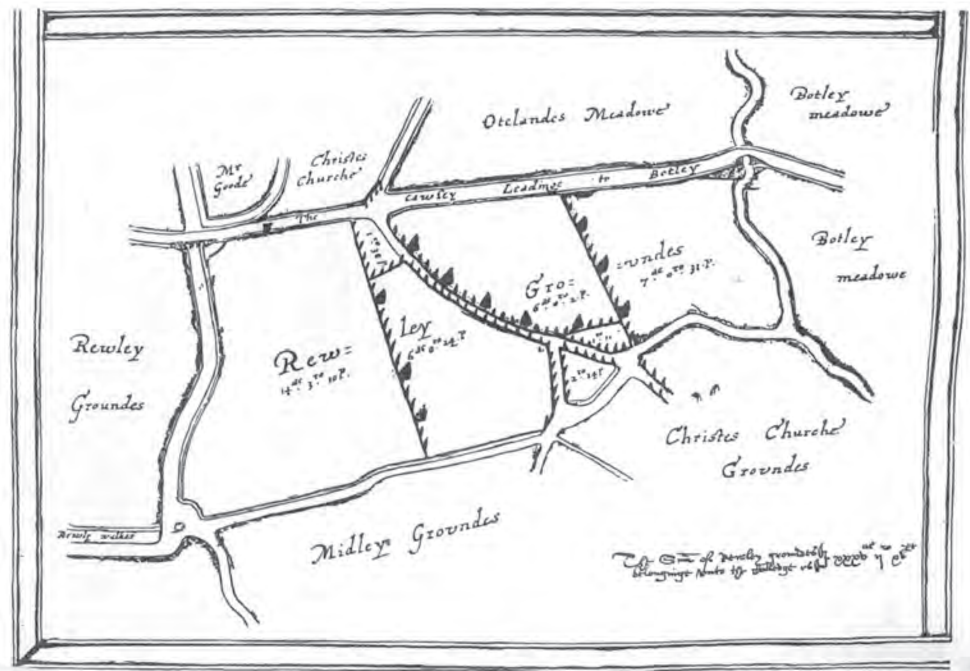

Fig. 7. Botley causeway in 1606 (Corpus Christi College map, reproduced in Cart. Oseney, *vol. 2, appendix). The ferryman's causeway from Hinksey is on the edge of Oatlands Meadow, top centre. South is at the top.*

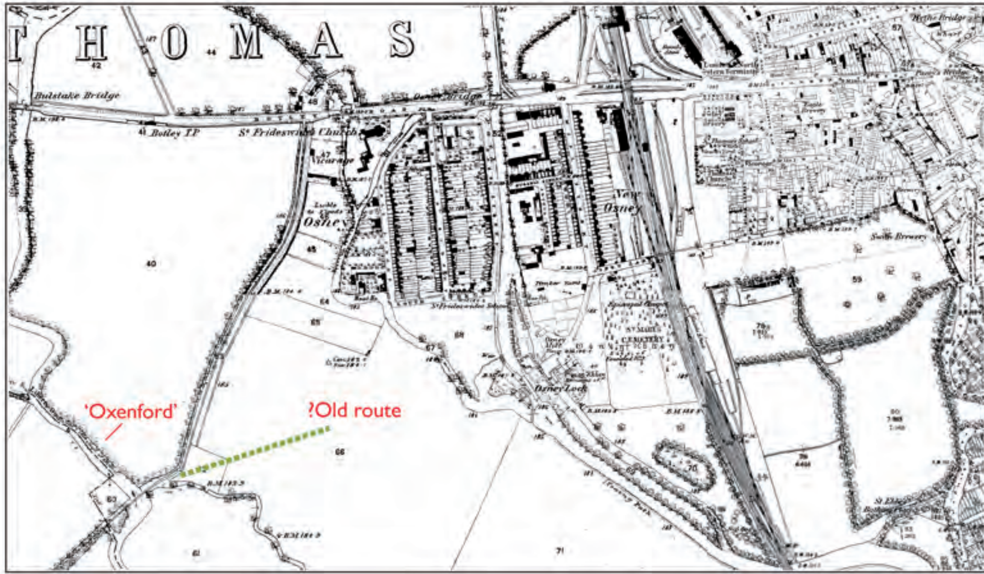

Fig. 8. Possible route eastwards from 'Oxenford' (OS map, 1876). © An Edina supplied mapping service.

Two points are clear: by 1467 the best, possibly only, route into Oxford from the west was over Osney Bridge, and before 1467 there had been a route from Hinksey ferry which did not use Osney Bridge. As discussed above, the emergence of the Osney Bridge route was obviously recent, since it came too late to affect the streets of St Thomas's parish shown by Agas. Where, then, was the earlier route from Hinksey ferry? The fact that the ferryman's proposed link with the Osney route started right back at 'King's swathe' near the identified 'Oxenford' suggests that there was no vestigial north-easterly route across the meadows towards, say, Osney Lane, which would have allowed him to build a much shorter causeway. Instead we should consider the possibility of an easterly route towards the town, from the point near 'Oxenford' where the ferryman's new causeway started northwards. The OS map of 1876 shows Osney mead and the meadows south of Osney Lane before building development obscured all clues, and on this uncluttered map (Fig. 8) it is apparent that, from the point where Ferry Hinksey Road turns north, a fairly straight route due-east might have crossed the river below Osney mill, passed south of the former Osney abbey, and reached a final river-crossing below Castle mill.

No firm evidence has been found, but several considerations make the suggested line fairly plausible. It would cross the river (the present main navigation channel of the Thames) near Osney mill. This was built in the twelfth century or earlier, probably on the same site as its twentieth-century successor,[42] and its location is significant: the chosen mill-site would surely have been upstream of any nearby river-crossing, otherwise the mill-leet would have destroyed the ford.[43] Therefore an early crossing place was likely to have been somewhere downstream of the present Osney lock, near to the south-west corner of the abbey precinct as depicted by Agas. The creation of Osney lock in 1790 and of Osney Marina in the 1970s has changed and obscured the lines of the medieval streams, but the 1878 OS map (Fig. 9) preserves a tantalizing hint of a possible river-crossing: on opposite sides of the mill tail, some sixty metres below the mill, were a pair of water-filled indentations in the river bank of the kind often formed when the flow of a stream is obstructed. Could these indicate the

[42] *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 330.
[43] Cf. discussion of Castle mill, above.

Fig. 9. Osney mill in the 1870s, showing indentations in the river bank on both sides of the mill tail (OS map, 1878). © An Edina supplied mapping service.

remains of a bridge? In 1878 the garden south-east of the mill buildings is shaped to respect the eastern indentation, and following its edge there seems to be a residual track to the river. The indentations disappeared in the late nineteenth century, but the building south of the eastern indentation, almost certainly shown on Agas's map of 1578, survived until the 1950s; an excavation in 1975 revealed that its footings on the river bank were medieval.[44] None of the many attempts to reconstruct the layout of the abbey site,[45] nor any of the archaeological investigations of the site, have been aware of the possibility of such a crossing. Yet, before the abbey built the causeway at Wereford, there was already a stone causeway near the abbey. A lease from the abbot in *c.*1200 mentions a 'great stone causeway', and the lessee of the adjacent tenement was forbidden to sublet to a female or to a townsman, implying that the causeway was in or very close to the abbey precinct.[46] Its location has never been discussed, so probably it was assumed to be at the end of Osney Lane. That is most unlikely (for the reasons given above), so it seems reasonable to speculate that the causeway related to a river-crossing downstream of the mill, and to a route along the southern edge of the abbey precinct. The existence of an ancient route on that line might explain the abbey's otherwise odd location.[47]

At the east end of the suggested line the 1876 map shows a track, some twenty feet wide, flanked by drainage ditches, running from the east side of the former abbey site towards the tail of Castle mill. This remarkable feature (long since covered by buildings) has escaped previous attention, perhaps because it straddled two sheets of the original large-scale OS map. It was highlighted by a recent digitisation of that map (Fig. 10), which merged sheets and tinted water-courses. In fact this feature was depicted in exactly the same form two centuries earlier on Loggan's map of 1675 (Fig. 11), but again it escaped attention, presumably because,

44 J. Sharpe, 'Oseney Abbey, Oxford: Archaeological Investigations, 1975–83', *Oxoniensia*, 50 (1985), pp. 95–130.

45 H. Hurst, *Oxford Topography*, OHS 39 (1899), pp. 92–4; conjectural plan in Bodl. MS Top. Oxon. c 313, f. 76.

46 Salter, *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, vol.2, pp. 480–1.

47 The oddity of the abbey's location in relation to the sixteenth-century streets in St Thomas's parish is noted in Palmer, 'A Beaker Burial', p. 138.

Fig. 10. Alley Mead in 1876, showing a track leading to the river at Swan's Nest (digitised version of OS map: © Historic Towns Trust).

Fig. 11. The Alley, the Malthouse, and Paradise Gardens in David Loggan's map of Oxford, 1675. South is at the top.

Fig. 12. Lechlade (Glos.), showing the ancient track (Bridge Walk, Church Path) crossing floodable meadows (OS map, 1876). © An Edina supplied mapping service.

lying close to the map's cartouche, it was taken to be just another field boundary. It was not depicted by Agas in 1578, but it was certainly there at that date: the feature was called the Alley in the nineteenth century and lay in Alley Mead,[48] and Alley Mead was named in 1546 among the possessions of the dissolved Osney abbey.[49] Beyond doubt the Alley was medieval, but after it fell out of use its function seems to have been quickly forgotten: in the eighteenth century it was thought to have been created as a walk for the monks of Osney, and on at least one nineteenth-century map, by a further confusion, it is labelled 'Friars Walk'.[50] The idea that it might have been an ancient road is firmly resisted by those willing to believe that monks created a scenic walk in their water meadows, anticipating by several centuries the landscape innovations of William Kent. Others suggest that the monks might have (pointlessly) created a way into town already provided by Osney Lane.

Arguments from analogy can be problematic, but it is worth considering a feature very similar to the Alley in the floodable meadows east of Lechlade (Glos.). Here (Fig. 12) a twenty-foot wide track, deeply-ditched on both sides, runs from St John's Bridge on the Thames to the centre of Lechlade; on the north the present main road, on drier ground, probably replaced the track as the route from the bridge into town in the Middle Ages. Here, too, there was a monastery next to the bridge, so this surviving track might also be seen as just another monkish fancy, a scenic walk into town. In this instance, however, the track can be shown to be part of an ancient route running east–west on the north bank of the Thames, passing through Kelmscott to St John's Bridge and so to the very centre of Lechlade (now the Market Place), where it originally formed one arm of a four-way crossroads. This was no monkish fancy; it shows how landscape features such as the Alley might be formed where early roads crossed floodable land.

In 1876 (Fig. 10) the east end of the Alley arrived at the river immediately west of Swan's Nest, a triangular spit of land at the south end of Warham Bank, where the Castle mill tail

[48] B. Badcock's survey of Christ Church property, 1829, printed in Salter, *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, vol. 2, pp. 582–632, especially p. 629.

[49] T. Squires, *In West Oxford* (1928), p. 101: transcript of a lease of Osney abbey, mentioning 'aley meadow'.

[50] OHC, B15/1/8D/2; printed plans of *c.*1840 in Bodl. G.A. Oxon. a 41, pp. 40–1.

rejoins the diverted back stream. On the eastern bank of the mill stream at that point, and in line with the tip of Swan's Nest, was a group of buildings on long, narrow plots, oddly angled to the river bank. Loggan's map of 1675 (Fig. 11) shows a road coming down to the millstream at this point and on the same alignment. Might these nineteenth-century plots indicate the line of a much earlier road? Certainly the 1876 map, showing the juxtaposition of the Alley, the spit of land, and these angled property boundaries (Fig. 13), encourages speculation that an ancient road crossed the river here, perhaps over a ford, perhaps carried later on a bridge across the tip of Swan's Nest. There is no known archaeological evidence for such a road, ford, or bridge, but a combination of above-ground evidence, maps, and documents lends some support to the hypothesis.

First, the discovered Anglo-Saxon surfaces in Castle Street indicate beyond reasonable doubt that there was an important crossing on this branch of the Thames immediately west of the town. Second, as argued above, the crossing was likely to be downstream of the Castle mill site. A crossing at the end of the mill tail, at Swan's Nest, is the most likely downstream site. Speculation that there was a lost medieval bridge at Swan's Nest gains some support from the fact that this spit of land was city property by the sixteenth century:[51] the city had the right to all manorial waste, which included closed streets and perhaps in this instance an abandoned bridge. Whether or not the angled plots east of the Swan's Nest were laid out on waste has not yet been verified, but there are strong indications that they covered an important road. The road shown at this point on Loggan's map of 1675 (Fig. 11), although apparently only a minor way down to the river bank, was flanked by ancient and inflexible features. On its south-east side was the wall of Paradise Gardens; this wall, not finally demolished until the 1960s, was in fact the medieval precinct wall of the Greyfriars. Its location and its angled line to the river bank were presumably dictated at the time of building by some existing feature outside the precinct on the north – a property boundary or, more likely, the road depicted on Loggan's map.

On the opposite side of Loggan's road were buildings, one of which survives in altered form. It is called the Paradise (or Old) Malthouse and was recently divided into luxury apartments; on first sight it seems unremarkable, a largely early nineteenth-century structure with some seventeenth-century detail, but its odd shape offers a cryptic and startling topographical clue. Whereas the west front is aligned with the mill-stream, and the north front at right-angles to that, the south front is angled so much to the north that the building's south-west corner, internally, measures only 65 degrees (Figs. 13 and 14). The bizarre and (from a builder's point of view) highly inconvenient footprint of this building (think of roof construction) was obviously dictated by an inflexible boundary on the south; the most plausible explanation is that at the time of building there was an established, important road here. Clearly there was no such road in the early nineteenth century, but the Old Malthouse stands almost certainly on ancient foundations: Loggan's map of 1675 (Fig. 11) shows a building on the same site and with the same alignment, and this was almost certainly a malthouse described as 'lately built' in 1619.[52] By then, as argued below, a route over Swan's Nest would have been long disused, so no important road dictated the shape and alignment of this earlier malthouse. Yet an explanation is required, the most plausible being that the seventeenth-century malthouse, too, preserved the footprint of an earlier structure, whose shape was influenced by its abutment on an important road.

I surmise that that there was a medieval road running from a bridge at Swan's Nest, flanked on one side by this oddly shaped building, on the other by the Greyfriars wall. By the nineteenth century the gap between these two features had been filled, and one deed marking the start of this piecemeal process contains tantalising detail. A lease of the malthouse in 1619 included a rectangular garden plot on its south side, measuring 54½ feet southwards

51 H.E. Salter, *Oxford City Properties* (1926), pp. 196–8.

52 OHC, Hall's Brewery deeds, B15/1/2D/44–5, 56.

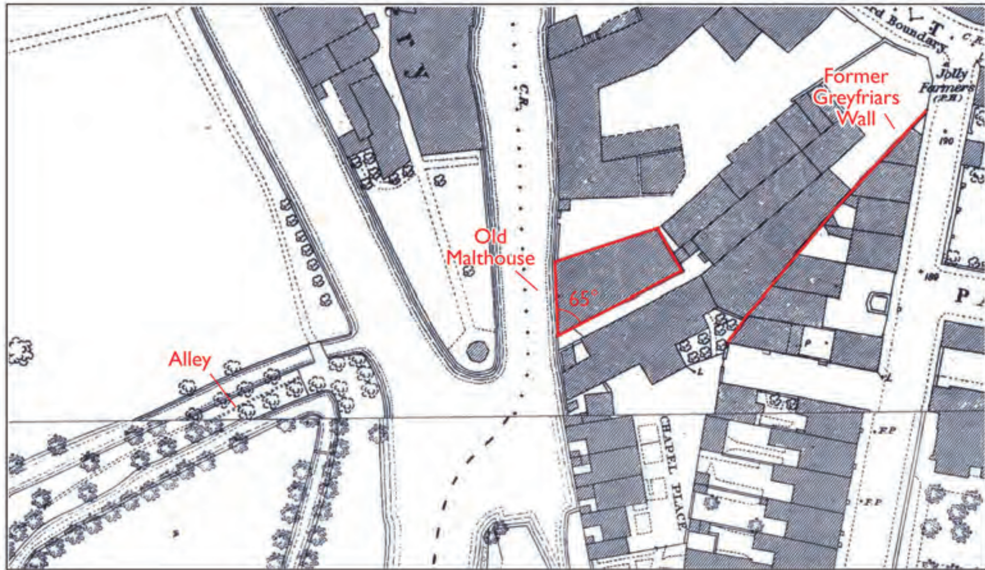

Fig. 13. Swan's Nest area in the 1870s (OS map, 1878). © An Edina supplied mapping service.

Fig. 14. The Old (or Paradise) Malthouse in 2014, showing the river frontage and the sharply angled south-west corner.

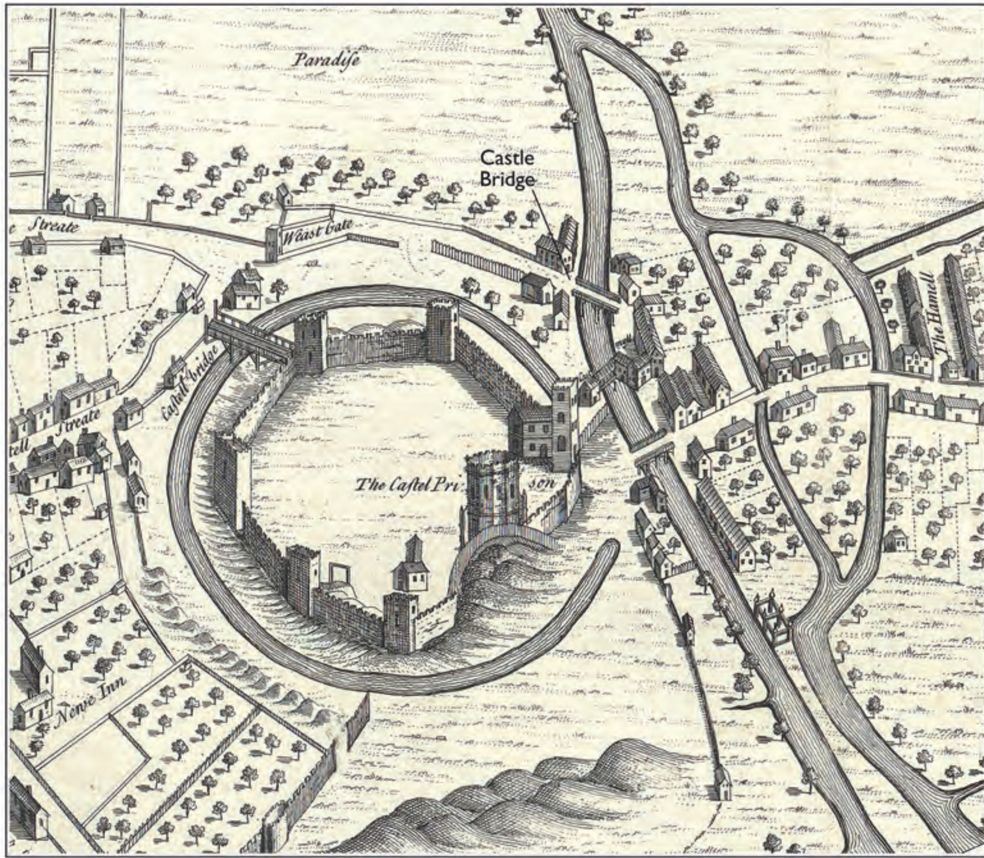

Fig. 15. Castle Bridge on Ralph Agas's map of Oxford, 1578. South is at the top.

from its riverside corner, and the same from its south-east corner.[53] The garden is shown next to the building on Loggan's map (Fig. 11): could this measured plot indicate the width of a redundant road?

If there was a route along the Alley and over Swan's Nest it presumably fell out of use in the fifteenth century, before the Hinksey ferryman built his causeway to join the Osney Bridge route in 1467. Thereafter the western approach to Oxford was along the zig-zag route through St Thomas's parish shown by Agas. The idea that there may have been a bridge at Swan's Nest, which also fell out of use in the fifteenth century, gains some support from Agas's map (Fig. 15). He depicts Paradise Street as it is now, crossing the mill stream at an oblique angle over Castle Bridge,[54] continuing as a narrow way through buildings before meeting St Thomas's High Street at a right-angle junction. The route's apparent unimportance in 1578 raises questions about the date and significance of Castle Bridge, hitherto assumed to have been built as part of a detour round the south side of the castle when the bailey blocked some direct route from the town westwards.[55] Yet, if a route over Castle Bridge was so early, why had it made so little impact on the street pattern of St Thomas's parish: why, in 1578, did it still join the High Street at a right-angle. It seems more likely that Castle Bridge was built much later,

53 OHC, B15/1/2D/44–5. The garden was absent from later leases of the malthouse.
54 Also called Castle Mill Bridge and (after the adjacent brewery) Swan Bridge: *VCH Oxon*. 4, pp. 288–9.
55 Ibid. p. 288; and see discussion of Castle Street below.

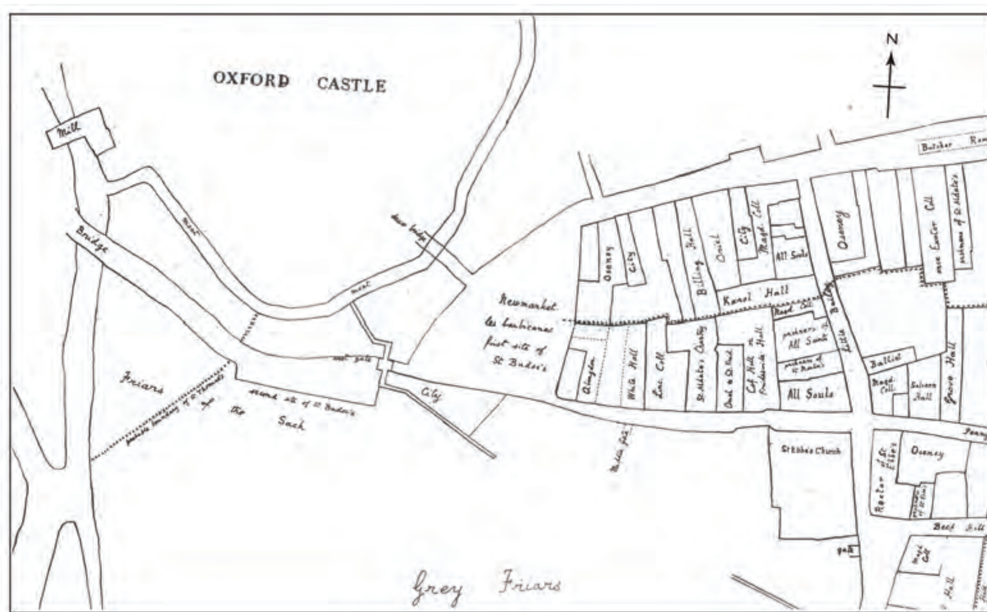

Fig. 16. The area of Swan's Nest and Paradise Street in H.E. Salter's Map of Medieval Oxford *(1934), showing (on the left) a possible parish boundary line running to Swan's Nest.*

far too late to have influenced the street pattern shown by Agas. Anthony Wood identified it as the New Bridge mentioned in an Osney abbey rental (as yet untraced),[56] and Herbert Hurst agreed that it was New Bridge;[57] but neither considered the possibility that it had been built on an entirely new site. H.E. Salter, ignoring references to New Bridge, seems to have accepted that Castle Bridge was ancient,[58] thereby missing a possible solution to his bafflement over the Paradise Street and Castle mill area. That part of his *Map of Medieval Oxford* (Fig. 16) is conspicuously empty because he could not locate properties mentioned in early deeds, notably those relating to the Friars of the Sack. One particular thirteenth-century tenement, assigned by Wood to St Thomas's parish, was said to stretch from the castle to the Thames; but Salter argued that to fit that description it must have lain further east in St Budoc's parish. Perhaps Salter was attempting a jigsaw puzzle with the wrong picture on the box: for if Castle Bridge and the road leading to it did not exist in 1250, if the road turned instead down towards Swan's Nest, then Wood's tenement in St Thomas's parish could indeed have stretched from castle to river. Interestingly Salter almost reached this solution by a quite different route, for his *Map* shows a possible boundary of St Thomas's parish exactly on the line of my suggested road from Swan's Nest. Taken together these small clues support the hypothesis that Castle Bridge was built after the route over Swan's Nest became redundant in the fifteenth century; perhaps (like the ferryman's causeway of 1467) it was built to join the main, or only, route from the west, over Osney Bridge and along St Thomas's High Street.

The final section of my suggested Anglo-Saxon western approach ran from Swan's Nest into Paradise Street, then up Castle Street to the late Anglo-Saxon surfaces at the west end of Queen Street (Fig. 17). It seems certain that at least the upper end of Castle Street (before its realignment in the 1970s) marked the line of an early road, since at the top were the Anglo-Saxon surfaces and further down the castle entrance where Fawkes de Breauté built a

[56] A. Clark (ed.), *Wood's City of Oxford,* 3 vols. OHS 15, 17, 37 (1889, 1890, 1899), vol. 1, p. 432.
[57] Hurst, *Oxford Topography*, pp. 41, 79.
[58] Salter, *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, vol.2, pp. 400–1.

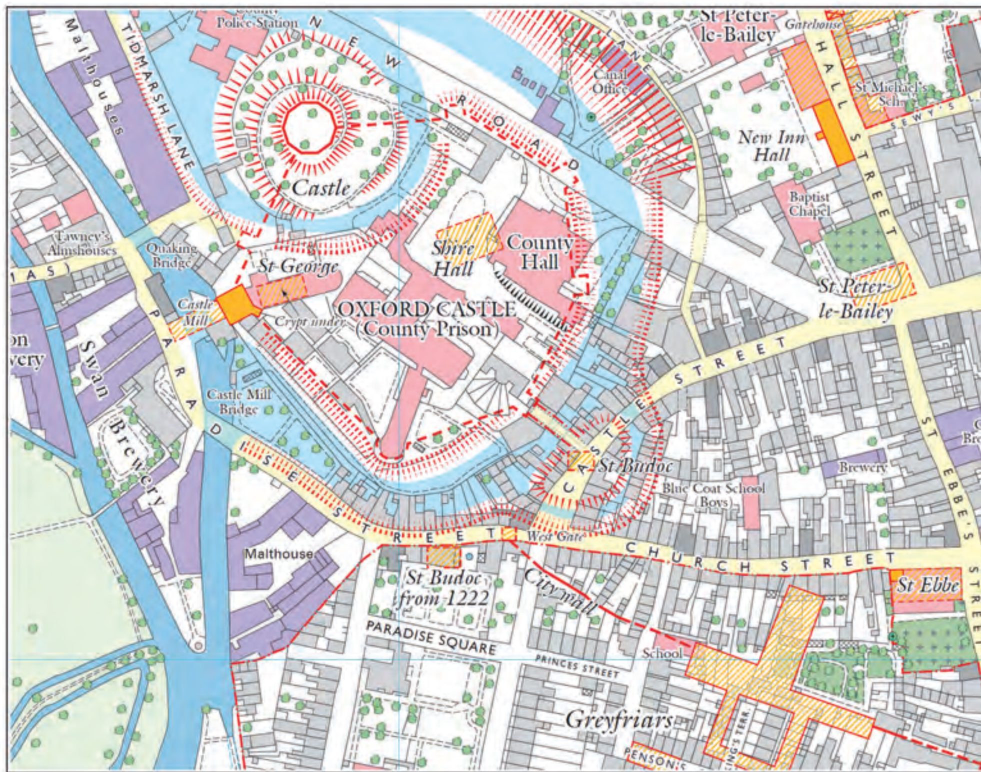

Fig. 17. The junction of Castle Street and Church Street in 1876, showing the sites of the Barbican, the West Gate, and St Budoc's church (digitised version of OS map, 1876: © Historic Towns Trust).

barbican in 1215. The location of the castle entrance surely shows that, when the castle bailey was laid out and moated (probably before 1100), the way from the castle into town was along what became Castle Street? This inference is challenged by those who assume (citing no evidence) that there was some lost street directly linking Queen Street with a river crossing near St George's Tower. They point out that we cannot be sure that the original castle entrance was on the site of the barbican of 1215—but do they really believe that de Breauté, hurrying to strengthen his castle, decided to abandon an existing entrance facing Queen Street, open a new one perhaps eighty metres further south, redesign his moat and walls, build a new bridge, and demolish St Budoc's church? Surely not; beyond reasonable doubt an important early road or street ran south-westwards from the end of Queen Street on the line of the later Castle Street. Where was it going? Apparently not to St George's Tower, but probably to a river-crossing well to the south-east of that tower.

The line of nineteenth-century Castle Street, branching north-eastwards from Church Street and curving into the west end of the straight Queen Street, suggests that it may have developed as traffic from an earlier route was attracted to the west entrance of the new *burh*.[59] It is generally agreed that the *burh*'s original east gate (near St Mary the Virgin church) may

[59] The line of Castle Street before the barbican was built is uncertain, but the discovered location of St. Budoc's church (destroyed by the barbican) suggests that the early line from Queen Street towards West Gate was not very different from that depicted on Agas's and later maps. For Castle Street and the barbican see Hassall et al, 'Excavations in St. Ebbe's, Part I', p. 274 and figs. 82–3; Hassall, 'Excavations at Oxford Castle, 1965–73', pp. 243–5, 250–4.

similarly have attracted new traffic, accounting for the curving line of the east end of High Street; it has also been suggested that the *burh*'s north gate may have attracted traffic from existing routes, accounting for the convergence of roads in St Giles. There can be little doubt that before Castle Street developed there was already heavy traffic into Oxford from the west, but the lines of pre-*burh* routes east of the suggested crossing at Swan's Nest may only be surmised. The fork from Church Street into Castle Street suggests that Church Street was probably an established route, carrying traffic eastwards along the edge of the gravel terrace towards the Cherwell river-crossing. The existence of an early road on this line would perhaps explain the location of the town's medieval west gate in Paradise Street, once thought to post-date the deflection of streets around the Norman castle.[60] A recently discovered rampart within the castle site, probably dating from the tenth century,[61] runs south-eastwards from St George's Tower on a straight line, which, if continued outside the castle site, aligns precisely with the southern section of the medieval town wall in St Ebbe's parish, which may therefore be earlier than previously thought. At the point where that line crosses the suggested early west–east road was the site of the town's medieval west gate: could that gate, too, be tenth-century in origin, part of an early western extension of the *burh*?

Almost all the evidence discussed above, documentary and archaeological, has been available for decades, sometimes for centuries. Perhaps that explains the surprise and scepticism which has greeted this review: how could such familiar material yield a new and coherent hypothesis to challenge traditional (but vague) assumptions about the Anglo-Saxon town? During lively debate a few minor objections have been raised over various way-points on the suggested western route, but no plausible, and certainly no coherent, alternatives have emerged. The argument about the relationship of fords and mill-leets, even when reluctantly accepted, has not shaken the traditional belief in an early crossing-place at Castle mill. The conviction that there must have been a direct route westwards from St George's Tower across St Thomas's parish has not been undermined by the negative evidence of Agas's map. Recently Osney Lane has been proposed as a likely early route, despite the many points raised against it in this article (none of them contradicted). Sceptics point rightly to the lack of absolute archaeological or documentary proof for the suggested line, but proof may be long in coming. The Alley disappeared in the early twentieth century when the field in which it lay was turned into a recreation ground, and later covered by the College of Further Education. The area between Swan's Nest and Paradise Street has been cleared and rebuilt with minimal archaeological observation (Fig. 18). If there was ever a road from 'Oxenford' towards Osney mill it now lies beneath the warehouses and offices of Osney Mead Industrial Estate; ironically the suggested line passes within yards of Janus House, the home of Oxford Archaeology. When the southern part of Osney abbey's precinct was excavated no signs of a river-crossing or road were found, but none were looked for.[62] At last some archaeological support for the suggested line has come from the recent discovery of a metalled track between the site of Hinksey ferry and the Bulstake Stream. Those who had long been convinced, on other grounds, that the way over Salter's 'Oxenford' was an important ancient route were pleased to have some confirmation; the sceptics, disturbed by this single discovery at one end of the suggested route, seem now to be thinking seriously about the rest.

Future archaeological discoveries in west Oxford may confirm or refute the suggested line. Meanwhile a search for stronger documentary support will involve looking out every scrap of evidence for the western meadows, re-examining all references to, and identifications of, bridges on the west side of Oxford, and trying to trace the descent of property in the Old Malthouse area. In the short term, however, the argument must be about interpretations of the evidence we have now, and those who are unhappy with this suggested western approach

60 *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 288.
61 Poore et al, 'Excavations at Oxford Castle', pp. 1–18.
62 Sharpe, 'Oseney Abbey: Archaeological Observations', pp. 95–130.

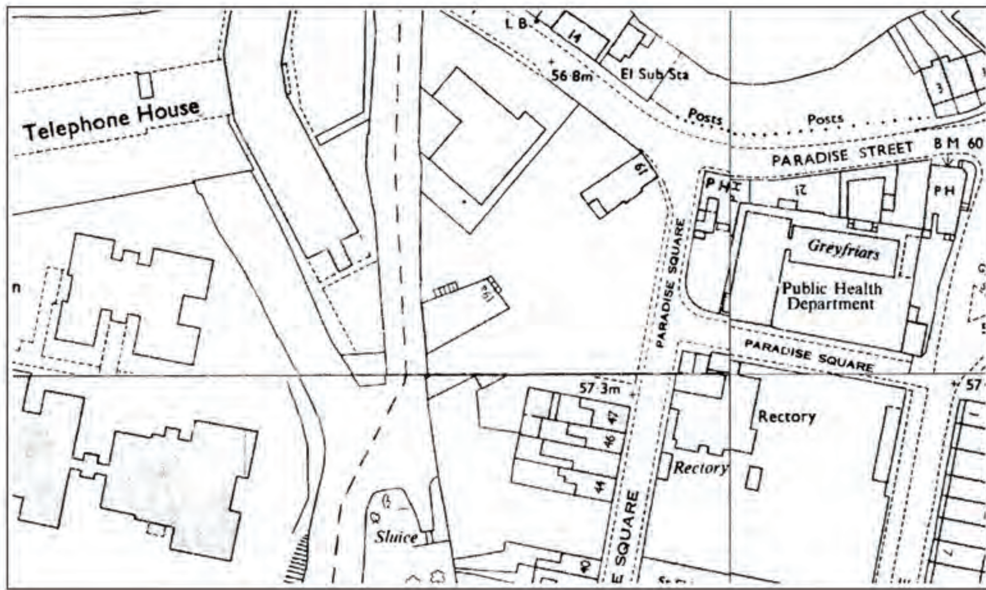

Fig. 18. OS map of 1975, showing the extent of building and demolition on both sides of the river at Swan's Nest. © An Edina supplied mapping service.

should at least offer their own more plausible hypotheses. Clearly it is time to think more carefully about the west side of the Anglo-Saxon town, so long neglected because of the model (outlined at the start of this article) which saw Oxford developing from a mid Anglo-Saxon settlement in St Aldate's. Could the main pre-*burh* settlement have been on the west?

It is accepted that Oxford was an important place in the late Anglo-Saxon period: one of Edward the Elder's sons died here in 924, as did Harold Harefoot in 1040; the great men of the realm gathered here for national councils on at least four occasions in the eleventh century.[63] But where were the buildings to accommodate these great events? Salter's *Survey* brought together all known medieval evidence for every plot of land within and immediately outside the Anglo-Saxon *burh,* but there are no residual traces of royal or public buildings in that area, except for a little town hall near Carfax.[64] Nor were such buildings found on the south side of the town where the pre-*burh* settlement was thought to have stood. On the castle site, however, as well as the unexpected tenth-century rampart, there seems to have been a large Anglo-Saxon hall, perhaps a royal meeting place.[65] Close by was almost certainly a church of minster status (Fig. 19): the church of St George, allegedly founded in the castle in 1074,[66] had extensive parochial rights which it could hardly have acquired after the Conquest. St George's must have been, or been successor to, an important Anglo-Saxon church, a point made as long ago as 1976 but generally disregarded.[67] Recent work on Oxford's medieval parish boundaries has confirmed that the unnamed Anglo-Saxon church which preceded St George's controlled a very large parish, covering on the west the whole area between the town and the county boundary, and on the north probably all the area which became the parishes of St Mary

[63] *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 9.
[64] H.E. Salter, *Survey of Oxford*, 2 vols. OHS n.s. 14, 20 (1960, 1969), vol. 2, p. 109.
[65] Poore et al, 'Excavations at Oxford Castle', pp. 1–18.
[66] *VCH Oxon*. 4, p. 381. This date, a later interpolation in some annals written *c.*1200 in Osney abbey register, has been assumed (without supporting evidence) to mark the foundation of a college of canons. As argued here, it probably marks the re-dedication of an existing church.
[67] J. Cooper, 'The Church of St George in the Castle', *Oxoniensia*, 41 (1976), pp. 306–8.

Fig. 19. St George's Tower and the remains of the church in 1795. Printed in E. King, Vestiges of Oxford Castle *(1796).*

Magdalen and St Giles.[68] This important church may have been attached to the formidable St George's Tower, now thought to be Anglo-Saxon, although that seems more likely to have been a fort.

If, at the Conquest, the west side of Oxford was fortified, and included major buildings such as this church and a great hall (perhaps already the centre of royal administration in the county), Robert d'Oilly's choice of castle site would seem entirely reasonable. He may, too, have wanted to control important routes, not only the western approach discussed here but also another clearly ancient route, running northwards from the river along the line of Stockwell (later Walton Street).[69] Whatever d'Oilly's motives, the massive Norman motte was not built on a whim.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am particularly grateful to Tom Hassall and Brian Durham, who helped me to understand the relevant archaeology and even organised a formal discussion of my ideas with local archaeologists. Both were enthusiastic supporters of the search for a coherent interpretation, although hardly persuaded by the conclusions. Crucial points in my argument were provided by Eleanor Chance, who noticed the odd shape of the Old Malthouse, suggested the possible analogy of Church Walk in Lechlade, and pointed to the significant location of the medieval Castle's main gateway on Castle Street.

[68] Forthcoming Oxford volume of the *Historic Towns Atlas*.
[69] Ibid. Walton Street, leading to the site of Walton manor, was a medieval parish boundary.

Wallingford's Medieval Burgage Plots

David E. Pedgley

SUMMARY

Plots marked on nineteenth-century maps of Wallingford are persistent from at least the sixteenth century, as shown by detailed surveys of 1548 and 1606 as well as leases of town properties from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. These are burgage plots typical of medieval English planned towns, and they can be grouped into either rectangles with areas of one rood (quarter acre, 0.1 hectare) or strips with built-up road frontages of around 20–24 feet (6–7 metres). Comparison with the distributions of properties paying borough lease rents or fixed medieval quit rents respectively suggests a zoning: strip plots liable to payment of quit rents were mostly confined to the main north–south and east–west roads and could be limited by back lanes, whereas the larger, rectangular plots associated with leases were more widely spread although mainly outside the congested main roads. This zoning presumably reflected not only the squeezing of burgesses into the space most in demand along the main roads but also perhaps differences in social status. It seems that residential occupation (at least in the south-eastern quarter) was within blocks of land defined by side roads uniformly placed according to a multiple-pole unit in a similar way to other burhs. *Domesday Book (1086) shows that Anglo-Saxon burgages were mostly small, which is consistent with a thriving town housing many traders and craftsmen.*

Wallingford (in Berkshire until 1974), founded on an Anglo-Saxon *burh*, is now a very much studied historic town (and castle), understood through both archaeology and documentary research.[1] Even so, more can be discovered of its medieval plan, in particular, through scrutiny of specific sources. For example, post-medieval quit and lease rents payable on properties have shed light on the medieval settlement pattern in the town.[2] Almost all of the quit rents were payable on dwelling houses wholly within the Anglo-Saxon ramparts. These houses were situated along the principal streets – Fish Street (later re-named St Mary's Street) had the most, High Street had few, and there were fewer still in Castle Street and St Martin's Street (see Fig. 1 for locations). There were none in Wood Street, St Peter's Street and St Leonard's Lane. In contrast, the distribution of seventeenth- to nineteenth-century borough lease rents was strikingly different, with notable concentrations in the south-western quadrant of the town, the southern side of St Leonard's Lane and within a narrow strip adjoining the ditch accompanying the western and southern ramparts – all probably parts of the royal estate that had been kept as open land during the Middle Ages after being acquired by the borough at the granting of its charter in 1155.

This article attempts to reconstruct the town's medieval layout from the boundaries of individual properties, as revealed in documents and early maps. The earliest known large-scale map of Wallingford (Fig. 2) shows property boundaries in 1837, before the subsequent

1 For recent results of research: K.S.B. Keats-Rohan and D.R. Roffe (eds.), *The Origins of the Borough of Wallingford: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives*, BAR BS, 494 (2009); N. Christie and O. Creighton with M. Edgeworth and H. Hamerow, *Transforming Townscapes. From Burh to Borough: The Archaeology of Wallingford, AD 800–1400*, Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph, 35 (2013); K.S.B. Keats-Rohan et al. (eds.), *Wallingford: The Castle and the Town in Context*, BAR BS, 621 (2015).

2 D.E. Pedgley, 'Rents as Indicators of the Medieval Settlement Pattern in Wallingford, Berkshire', in Keats-Rohan et al. (eds.) *Wallingford: The Castle and the Town in Context*, pp. 227–31.

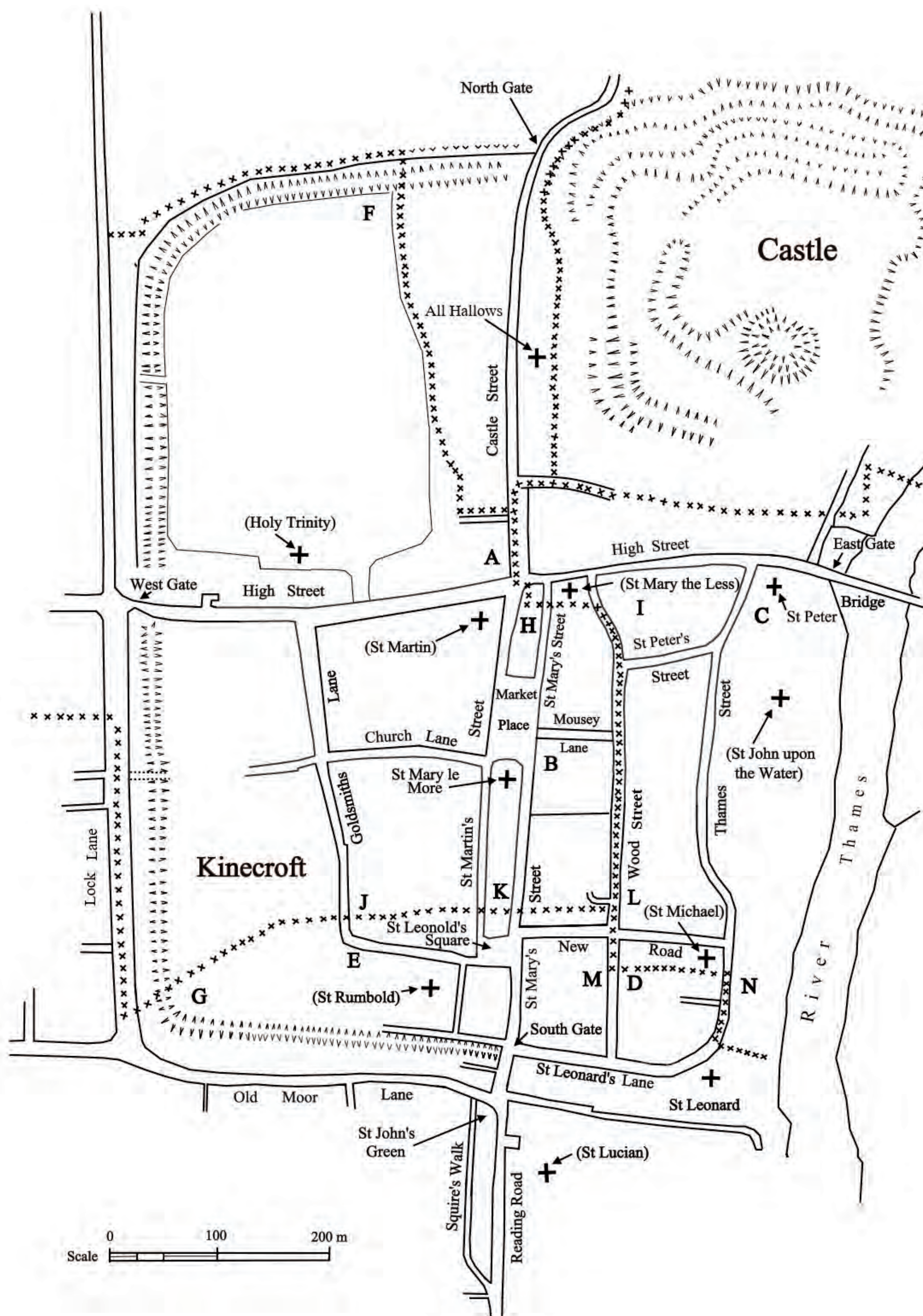

Fig. 1. Places mentioned in the text, and present-day parish boundaries (marked 'x x x'). Lost medieval parish churches are named in brackets. Letters 'A' to 'N' represent plots mentioned in the text below.

Fig. 2. The earliest known large-scale map of Wallingford. It is undated but internal evidence, such as the presence or absence of particular buildings, strongly suggests 1837 as the year of survey. Perhaps the map was intended to serve as the base for subsequent tithe maps of individual parishes (the plot numbers are the same) and was commissioned following the 1836 Tithe Act, but by whom is unknown – there is no reference to its preparation in council minutes. Additionally, it may be connected with the report on the proposed boundary changes of the borough – see Parliamentary Papers, 1837, XXVIII, Part III, pp. 304–6.

complex modifications recorded on later Ordnance Survey maps. Even a casual inspection reveals a mass of small boundaries enclosing plots with an obvious variety of shapes and sizes. However, there is an impressive number of straight boundaries more or less perpendicular to the streets. Below I will argue that these relict boundaries define medieval burgage plots – urban land laid out from the early years of a planned town. Much of the great variety shown on OS maps reflects subsequent boundary changes over the centuries.

BURGAGE PLOTS

The boundaries of burgage plots are often found to have been remarkably stable from medieval times until today, partly because it was difficult to make changes in a close-built

urban environment but especially because a plot defined the holder's status as an enfranchised burgess. This provided legal, trading and financial privileges including rights to carry on a craft or trade, to have free access to markets and fairs, and to allow free transfer of plots by sale or bequest. These privileges were granted on payment of a fixed annual money rent to the lord that excused the holder from all or most of the services that might otherwise have been due, and with a condition to build a house on the open land.[3] Plots were subject to division as population increased, but with little or no change in their boundaries. Amalgamation could also occur but that was mostly modern, so rectangular plots shown on early maps mirror the original layout. Dimensions were sometimes recorded in town documents, as will be seen below, and disputes appear in the records of borough courts.[4] There was often progressive infilling of backyards with buildings and even a well, and rubbish was usually disposed of within individual plots, typically in pits, as is commonly found in excavations.

Patterns of burgage plots have been examined for various medieval towns, both individually (for example Thame, Oxfordshire; Wells, Somerset; and Bridgnorth, Shropshire),[5] in groups (for example Hertfordshire, the Midlands and Scotland),[6] and as part of more general surveys.[7] But, despite their well-recognised value in helping to reveal the development of medieval towns,[8] and their undoubted presence in Wallingford at least as early as 1155 (at the granting of the town's charter, as inferred from the prominence given to its burgesses),[9] the pattern of burgage plots in the town has not been examined. The plots were not even mentioned in several histories of the town,[10] nor in a recent paper on its origin.[11] This article attempts to remedy this deficiency.

WALLINGFORD'S BURGAGE PLOTS – TODAY

Unlike most early planned towns in England, which were founded in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries by local lords, Wallingford was a royal *burh*, one of the fortified sites initiated by King Alfred at the end of the ninth century to defend the frontier of Wessex against threatened attacks by the Danes.[12] Appearing prominently in the *Burghal Hidage* (probably compiled in

[3] C. Dyer, 'The Urbanizing of Staffordshire: The First Phases', *Staffordshire Studies*, 14 (2002), pp. 1–31.

[4] For discussions of Wallingford's medieval court records: N.M. Herbert, 'The Borough of Wallingford 1155–1400', Reading University Ph.D. thesis (1971), pp. 67–96; C. Dyer, with M. Tompkins and M. Yates, 'Documents and the Town: Place and People in Medieval Wallingford's Court Rolls', in Christie et al., *Transforming Townscapes*, pp. 293–9.

[5] J. Spavold and M. Gilman, 'The Burgage Plots of Thame, 1150–1340', *Oxoniensia*, 67 (2002), pp. 29–58; A.J. Scrase, 'Development and Change in Burgage Plots: The Example of Wells', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 15 (1989), pp. 349–65; J. Haslam, 'The Articulation of Burgages and Streets in Early Medieval Towns, Part 1: The Case of Bridgnorth, Shropshire', *Landscape History*, 37 (2016), pp. 51–68.

[6] T.R. Slater, 'Planning English Medieval "Street Towns": The Hertfordshire Evidence', *Landscape History*, 26 (2004), pp. 19–35; T.R. Slater, 'Plan Characteristics of Small Boroughs and Market Settlements: Evidence from the Midlands', in K. Giles and C. Dyer (eds.), *Town and Country in the Middle Ages: Contrasts, Contacts and Interconnections, 1100–1500* (2005), pp. 23–42; G. Stell and R. Tait, 'Framework and Form: Burgage Plots, Street Lines and Domestic Architecture in Early Suburban Scotland', *Urban History*, 43 (2016), pp. 2–27.

[7] T.R Slater, 'The Analysis of Burgage Patterns in Medieval Towns', *Area*, 13 (1981), pp. 211–16.

[8] J.W.R. Whitehand, 'British Urban Morphology: The Conzenian Tradition', *Urban Morphology*, 5 (2001), pp. 103–9; J.W.R. Whitehand, 'Urban Morphology and Historic Urban Landscapes', UNESCO, *Managing Historic Cities,* World Heritage Papers, 27 (2010), pp. 35–43.

[9] J.K. Hedges, *The History of Wallingford* (1881), vol. 1, pp. 270–3; A. Ballard, *British Borough Charters 1042–1216* (1913), p. 80.

[10] Hedges, *The History of Wallingford*; *VCH Berks.* 3, pp. 517–31; J. Dewey and S. Dewey, *The Book of Wallingford* (1977); J.S. Hardman, *Wallingford: A History of an English Market Town* (1994).

[11] J. Dewey, 'The Origins of Wallingford: Topography, Boundaries and Parishes', in K.S.B. Keats-Rohan and D.R. Roffe (eds.), *The Origins of the Borough of Wallingford* (2009), pp. 17–26.

[12] J. Haslam (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England* (1984), p. 60.

the early tenth century),[13] it was built upon an earlier settlement[14] occupying a flat site similar to the *burhs* at Wareham and Cricklade. It was at the limit of navigation of a major waterway at its lowest fordable crossing but on a gravel terrace above the flood plain, and with road links into southern and western Wessex. Being so strategically placed, it was defended by earthwork ramparts that could provide emergency protection for a large rural population. In area it was second only to the capital of Wessex, Winchester.

Although the development of Wallingford as a *burh* in the tenth and early eleventh centuries is undocumented, *burh* status encouraged the town to flourish. Its rectangular, earthen, defensive rampart had gates on each of its four sides, leading to two axial streets crossing centrally. They divided the land into four quarters, thereby providing an orderly arrangement conducive to planned occupation by tenants. Precise dating of these streets is currently impossible in the absence of archaeological evidence, but they are represented today by High Street, Castle Street, and the paired St Mary's Street/ St Martin's Street.[15] There have been some alterations in layout such as noted below and some other streets may have disappeared altogether.[16] During the Middle Ages and later the residential area was largely confined to the south-eastern quarter and part of the south-west, the other two quarters being either open space (as at Cricklade)[17] or reserved for royal or ecclesiastical use, all of which suggests planning from the beginning. There were also east–west side streets dividing the quarter into blocks, reflected in present-day Hart Street, Mousey Lane and St Peter's Street; also, Church Lane and Goldsmiths Lane (southern end) may indicate there were similar side streets in the south-western quarter. Other lanes are known to have disappeared by the fifteenth century.[18] Within the south-eastern quarter, side streets were placed apparently with a north–south spacing of 25 poles (125 metres),[19] reflecting the use of multiple-pole 'units' found in the lay-out of other *burhs*.[20] The resulting blocks of land would have been initially occupied by traders and craftsmen largely serving their rural lords as though they were living on extensions of their manors. There would probably have been others serving the king, particularly if there was a royal residence; and yet more would be serving the town's growing population. By the time of Domesday many of the royal servants in Berkshire and Oxfordshire had property in Wallingford (but not permanent residences) along with churchmen and merchants.[21] The town therefore became an administrative centre for the

[13] D. Hill and A.R. Rumble (eds.), *The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications* (1996), p. 33.

[14] The evidence comes from its Anglo-Saxon name and those of nearby settlements, a pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon cemetery, the western rampart being placed on ploughed soil, the northern rampart containing early and middle Anglo-Saxon pottery, and parish boundaries crossing the ramparts (as at Wareham, for example): N. Christie and H. Hamerow, in Christie et al., *Transforming Townscapes*, pp. 45–65. There may even have been an Anglo-Saxon minster: Dewey, 'The Origins of Wallingford'.

[15] Note the similar separations: Thames Street (south end)/St Mary's Street and St Mary's Street/Goldsmiths Lane, bearing in mind that Thames Street has clearly been realigned at some unrecorded date – perhaps around 1770, the year when Sir William Blackstone obtained permission from the corporation to stop up the former eastward extension of Hart Street (that led straight to the front door of his mansion, Castle Priory) and replace it with present-day New Road (Berks RO, W/Ac1/1/3, f. 11r).

[16] It is possible that the street pattern includes an element of pre-*burh* layout with a centre perhaps situated just outside the south gate: Dewey, 'The Origins of Wallingford'.

[17] G. Astill, 'General Survey 600–1300', in D.M. Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. 1 (2000), pp. 27–49.

[18] For example, Corteys Lane and Symeones Lane in former Holy Trinity parish, Masons Lane in former St Mary-the-Less parish, and Yrlondes Lane in former St John-upon-the-Water parish.

[19] R.J. Neale, 'Assessing *Burh* Planning and Design', in Christie et al., *Transforming Townscapes*, pp. 72–80. It is suggested that blocks were divided into square plots of side equal to a quarter of the street separation, that is 6¼ x 6¼ poles, or 1 acre (0.4 hectare).

[20] P. Crummy, 'The System of Measurement Used in Town Planning from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries', in *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, BAR BS, 72 (1979), pp. 149–64.

[21] D.R. Roffe, 'Wallingford in Domesday and Beyond', in Keats-Rohan and Roffe (eds.), *The Origins of the Borough of Wallingford*, pp. 27–51; D. Roffe, 'A Tale of Two Towns and Castles: Nottingham and Wallingford Compared', in Keats-Rohan et al. (eds.) *Wallingford: the Castle and the Town*, pp. 194–9.

shire as well as a market for country produce. As thirteenth- and fourteenth-century borough records show, there was not only a diversity of craftsmen and traders but also, surprisingly, even vintners and goldsmiths – presumably to provide services for the gentry and clergy in particular as well as the staff of the castle and its visitors.[22]

In Wallingford the 1837 town map (Fig. 2) shows that, using long boundaries extending from a street and ending in a common boundary with neighbours (and therefore less likely than shorter boundaries to have been altered over time), it is possible to distinguish two kinds of plot – strip plots and larger, rectangular plots. They have the following characteristics.

Strip plot characteristics:

1. long and narrow, and perpendicular to streets;
2. taking obvious clusters of 4–10 strip plots on the 1837 map, and measurements from the 1:2,500 1876 OS map, cluster-average widths are around 21–25, 33–37 and 50 feet – suggesting a planned 'unit' width of around 20–24 feet (1½ poles, 6–7 metres), with some strips one and a half units or two units wide;
3. they are most numerous (with east–west orientation) in St Mary's Street east side, St Martin's Street west side and Castle Street west side, but fewer occur in High Street (where they have a north–south orientation), and almost none in Thames Street, Goldsmiths Lane and St Leonard's Lane;
4. lengths are up to around 260 feet (80 metres);
5. each has a building adjoining both street and neighbours, and often with a further building at the rear and sometimes adjoining a 'back lane';
6. only one narrow inter-plot lane seems to have survived – Mousey Lane, on the eastern side of the Market Place.

These characteristics can be compared with the following known properties of medieval burgage plots in other towns:[23]

1. often long and narrow, and arranged approximately perpendicular to a street;
2. form a series along a street;
3. boundaries are fixed and indicated by a ditch, bank, hedge, wall or fence, or by marker stones;
4. plot widths are similar along a street (a 'unit' – typically 15–25 feet (4.6–7.6 metres), or some fraction of it);
5. each plot has a building fronting on or near the street, either adjoining neighbours or separated from them by narrow lanes or alleys;
6. backyard is limited by a boundary jointly with neighbours or by a joint 'back lane', often with one or more facing buildings.

It is clear from the shapes and sizes of strip plots in Wallingford, and the positioning of buildings both front and rear, that these are typical narrow, medieval burgage plots. Their widths seem to be based on a unit of around 20–24 feet (6–7 metres, perhaps varying over time, but pre-dating the standard pole or perch of 16½ feet or 5 metres), with some plots being 1½ or 2 units wide. A few strips have half a 'unit' width: 79 and 80 High Street (A in Fig. 1) – 10 and 10½ feet (3 metres), as measured in a frontage survey of 2002;[24] and 12A St Mary's Street (B in Fig. 1) – 10¼ feet. The first two, being paired, may reflect plot

[22] Berks RO, W/FC (company rolls), W/TC (tallage rolls) and W/JB (burghmote and court rolls); Herbert, 'The Borough of Wallingford'; C. Dyer et al., 'Documents and the Town'.

[23] For discussions see, for example, Slater, 'The Analysis of Burgage Patterns'; idem, 'Planning English Medieval "Street Towns"'; R. Coleman and C. Smith, 'The Archaeology of Burgage Plots in Scottish Medieval Towns: A Review', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 134 (2004), pp. 281–323.

[24] Wallingford Museum, 2016–42.

division,[25] but the last one is not paired and may therefore be original. Sometimes there has been encroachment on neighbours such that boundaries have become distorted.

Rectangular plot characteristics:

1. wide frontage of several 'units' (some may have included earlier strips that have been amalgamated and are now lost);
2. some with a building adjoining the street but not taking up the whole frontage;
3. they are most numerous in Goldsmiths Lane, High Street west of the cross-roads and St Martin's Street west side;
4. some are named – probably an indication of previous prominent holders – for example:

Anesty's Place (C)[26]	John Anesty, constable of Wallingford Castle in 1348
Boddingtons's Place (D)	William Boddington, MP 1421, mayor several times between 1437 and 1449
Beansheafs (E)	Thomas Bensheff, mayor 1375–77

Comparably rectangular plots have been recognised in other towns, for example Thame[27] and Stratford-upon-Avon.[28] Perhaps all or most of Wallingford plots were originally rectangular, as at Worcester,[29] some of which became divided into the strips that persist until today.

WALLINGFORD'S BURGAGE PLOTS – POST-MEDIEVAL

We can expect Wallingford's burgage plots to have had histories similar to those elsewhere, particularly in relation to the persistence of boundaries over many centuries. But what is the evidence that these strip and rectangular plots are indeed ancient? Although there are no known large-scale maps earlier than 1837, a detailed survey of the town in 1548 by the king's surveyor Roger Amyce provides dimensions of many plots in the High Street and St Mary's Street.[30] There is little difference in distribution of widths in these two streets. After allowing for an apparent tendency to use approximate measurements, 20, 30, 40 and 50 feet (6, 9, 12 and 15 metres), there is some grouping around 22 feet (6.5 metres), 32 feet (9.7 metres) and 47 feet (14.3 metres) – remarkably similar to those derived from the 1876 OS map, but with a 'unit' around 22 feet. This is consistent with the expected long-term persistence of the plots. However, many strips appear as open ground in 1548 with no buildings – are these indicative of the town's well-documented medieval decline?[31] Areas derived from their dimensions are almost all less than about 5,000 square feet (half a rood, 0.05 hectare) and many are only around 1,000 square feet (one tenth of a rood, 0.01 hectare) and even less. Where areas, not dimensions, are stated, the most common is one rood (a quarter of an acre, 0.1 hectare) and the next most common is half a rood or one and a half roods. A few are larger, up to 3 acres (12 roods, 1.2 hectare), while the largest – with areas of three roods and more – are mostly on the west side of St Martin's Street and off Goldsmiths Lane, and the open land between Wood Street and Thames Street.

[25] And similarly 22–23 High Street.
[26] C in Fig. 1, which also shows D and E.
[27] Spavold and Gilman, 'The Burgage Plots of Thame'.
[28] C. Dyer, 'The Archaeology of Medieval Small Towns', *Medieval Archaeology*, 47 (2003), pp. 85–114; J. Haslam, 'Planning in Late Saxon Worcester', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 19 (2015), pp. 153–72.
[29] C. Dyer and T.R. Slater, 'The Midlands', in Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. 1, pp. 609–38.
[30] Bodl. MS Top. Berks b. 41.
[31] M. Yates and O. Creighton, with V. Reed, 'Debating Later Medieval Urban Trajectories, AD 1200–1400', in Christie et al., *Transforming Landscapes*, pp. 411–14.

A comparable survey of 1606 does not contain dimensions, but does give areas for eighty-six plots, almost all expressed in fractions of an acre.[32] In this survey, the dominant size is one rood (0.1 hectare) while almost all the others are either two roods (0.2 hectare) or some fraction of one rood down to a quarter. Of the twenty larger plots, two roods and more, some are in the High Street but most are on the west side of St Martin's Street and off Goldsmiths Lane, and in the open land between Wood Street and Thames Street – the same distribution as in 1548.

Further evidence for the long-term persistence of these boundaries is provided by leases of fifty-three town properties which recorded widths (not areas) – almost all unchanged from the mid seventeenth to mid nineteenth century.[33] Widths of nearly half were greater than 50 feet (15 metres) – mostly located in the rectangular plots identified on the 1837 map, including Goldsmiths Lane, also Lock Lane and Old Moor Lane (these latter two outside the Anglo-Saxon ramparts), where no tenements were noted in the 1548 survey. Of the narrower strips, the eight in High Street and St Mary's Street show clustering around 10–13 feet (3–4 metres) and 27–32 feet (8–10 metres), perhaps half and one-and-a-half 'units' of around 20 feet (6 metres). Along St Leonard's Lane south side, eight plots range in width from 19 to 29 feet (6–9 metres), and average 22 feet (6.5 metres). Given that these were laid out almost certainly after the Civil War of the 1640s, they suggest intriguingly that the town was still using the old 'unit' width to divide its previously open ground in the lane. A scatter of earlier town leases (from mid thirteenth to late fifteenth centuries) unfortunately do not include areas or dimensions.[34]

Although Wallingford was a *burh* superimposed on an existing landscape, there is no evidence that its plots were based on earlier field or pasture boundaries, as has been suspected in some towns. Also, the timing of plot formation in relation to the setting out of the street grid cannot be assessed from the distinctive boundary pattern of contemporaneous plots at corners where streets meet at right angles,[35] because no such pattern occurs at any corner in Wallingford,[36] even excluding those where there have been known or inferred changes to street positions. It therefore seems likely that the earliest plots were set out subsequent to street planning. It should be noted that an exception to the rule of straight plot boundaries exists at the northern end of Wood Street where it bends to the west on approaching High Street. Here the strip plots on its western side are curved so as to be perpendicular to both Wood Street and St Mary's Street. This aberration is likely to result from Wood Street being placed to avoid the Town Ditch flowing southwards not far from its eastern side.[37] It suggests that Wood Street pre-dates these burgage plots and was part of the original street grid as well as later functioning as a back lane to properties in St Mary's Street.[38]

Comparison of the distributions of quit-rent strip plots and lease rent-paying properties is revealing. Because quit rents were largely fixed over time their pattern of distribution was correspondingly fixed – hence their modern distribution (sixteenth to nineteenth century, based on borough rentals)[39] reflects the medieval settlement pattern, allowing for any losses in the meantime. Almost all quit rents were payable on dwelling houses along streets within the south-eastern quarter of the town. The positions of these properties can be pinpointed from nineteenth-century censuses and lists of inhabitants and therefore equated to medieval positions. Comparing this distribution with that of strip plots reveals considerable overlap:

32 TNA, E 315/369, pp. 101–23.
33 Book of leases 1700–1878 (although the series starts, in fact, in 1665), Berks RO, W/RTc 1–3.
34 Berks RO, W/TC, W/TL, W/TH, W/RTb.
35 Requiring a diagonal rear boundary, as in Bridgnorth – see Haslam, 'The Articulation of Burgages'.
36 And similarly at Dorchester, Dorset: Dyer, 'The Archaeology of Medieval Small Towns'.
37 Perhaps identical with the medieval Mascall's Ditch – see, for example, Berks RO, W/JBc 1,10,13.
38 The earliest known reference is in a 1298 grant of a rent in return for freedom of the borough: Berks RO, W/TCc7.
39 Berks RO, W/FAb 1 (1584/5), WA/FRa (1674–1880).

Strip plots:	Quit rent properties:
St Mary's Street, St Martin's Street west side, and Castle Street west side	St Mary's Street, High Street, and (fewer) St Martin's Street and Castle Street

In contrast to quit rents, the distribution of borough lease rents is strikingly different, with a notable concentration in the south-western quarter, as well as along a strip of land just outside the Anglo-Saxon rampart from the west gate southwards then eastwards to the River Thames. All of these properties were probably part of the king's estate at the time of granting the town charter (in 1155) and subsequently kept as open land until leased as individual plots.[40] Comparing this distribution with that of rectangular plots also reveals considerable overlap:

Rectangular plots:	Borough lease rent properties:
Goldsmiths Lane, High Street west of cross-roads, between Wood Street and Thames Street, and St Martin's Street west side	Goldsmiths Lane, and (fewer) High Street, and land just outside ramparts

This overlap with rectangular plots is confirmed by the fifty-three town properties mentioned above, which were among those paying lease rents, since nearly half of them had frontages greater than 50 feet (15 metres).

The granting of burgage tenure to traders and craftsmen included a right of access to the town market, and the formation of a market would have been contemporaneous with uptake of burgage plots. Wallingford's market was well established by the time of Domesday. This is to be expected of flourishing towns where the defensive reason for their establishment had become secondary to commerce, although probably not true for Wallingford because of its particularly important strategic position and administrative function. In most medieval towns a particular street would have been made broad enough to form a central market place, either cigar-shaped if broadened in the middle or thinly triangular if at one end. In Wallingford, it had been suggested that the present-day market place was imposed on the western side of St Mary's Street from the High Street southwards to St Leonard's Square at least.[41] However, excavation in 2003 south of St Mary's church, at 51–53 St Mary's Street, found a levelling of the area immediately post-Conquest by use of town waste to fill old ditches and pits of indeterminate function, supporting the idea that the market space was an original feature – a broad street that has become largely infilled with buildings, leaving the narrow north–south St Mary's and St Martin's Streets on either sides.[42]

But where was the market? In 1271/2 the corn market was stated to be in the parish of St Lucian, which was outside the south gate.[43] It is likely that this market would have been held near the king's mill at the south gate, on what is now St John's Green at the northern, broader end of the triangular piece of land (where incoming carts could unload) now lying between Reading Road and Squires Walk. A bakehouse is recorded at south gate in 1332,[44] perhaps an indication that the name 'Brutte Strete' (present-day Reading Road) is a corruption of 'Bread Street' for the highway extending southwards from south gate. But by 1325 the corn market was in the parish of St Mary-the-More[45] – presumably in the present-day Market

40 Pedgley, 'Rents as Indicators'.
41 J. Bond, 'The Oxford Region in the Middle Ages', in G. Briggs et al. (eds.) *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region* (1986), pp. 135–59.
42 S. Preston (ed.), *Archaeological Investigations in Wallingford, Oxfordshire, 1992–2010. The Role of the Planning System in Archaeological Research,* TVAS Monograph, 10 (2012).
43 Berks RO, W/RTb 25.
44 Ibid. W/RTb 89.
45 Ibid. W/THa 41.

Place. Perhaps the move was associated with the westwards displacement of Castle Street in the late thirteenth century to accommodate the addition of a third bailey to the castle,[46] making St Martin's Street the main north–south route instead of St Mary's Street. Other parts of the market were elsewhere: for example, the fish market was at the northern end of Fish Street (now St Mary's Street),[47] presumably to be near access to the River Thames; and the wood market was perhaps in Wood Street. Subsequent infill of the market space has included a row of small shops at its northern end where there is no space or indeed need for backyards.

Where plot owners are named in the 1548 survey, those in the larger, rectangular plots are shown from other records to be mostly prominent inhabitants, some holding civic offices (for example, castle porter, mayor, bailiff, sergeant-at arms), but also gentlemen and clergy; and some were multiple owners, including Ralph Pollington, several times mayor, and widows Lady Anne Rede and Rose Cheney. As for occupiers of plots in general, the few named are shown from other records to be mostly more humble inhabitants – traders or craftsmen, or simply 'burgesses' – and tending to be housed in the strip plots. But overall the association of social status with plot type is not clear cut.

WALLINGFORD'S BURGAGE PLOTS – PRE-CONQUEST

Archaeology so far has not been able to add much to understanding the properties of burgage plots in pre-Conquest Wallingford. Until the recent '*Burh* to Borough' project (intensive phase 2008–2010),[48] with its remit to examine the formation and development of the town (as well as to test competing hypotheses on urban origins), there had been few extensive archaeological investigations. One excavation near the central cross-roads, at the site of the former church of St Martin (Fig. 1), yielded pottery sherds from the late tenth century.[49] Two early buildings adjoining streets have been found in excavations. In 1979–80, in St Martin's Street opposite St Mary's church, a sunken-featured building of the late tenth century was revealed with its gable end fronting the street (in contrast to similarly aged structures elsewhere which lie to the rear of street-facing buildings).[50] It was apparently not a house but perhaps a workshop or store, and because its full extent was not determined its size cannot be compared with the burgage plots dimensions discussed above. In contrast, the other excavation, in 2008 on the Kinecroft as part of the project, found part of the ground plan of a timber house in the seemingly short-lived twelfth-century westward expansion of the settled area of the town at the peak of its prosperity. It was aligned along a lane for at least six metres, which fits within the six to seven metre 'unit' strip plot width.[51]

Ditches have been found in a few places elsewhere in the town but their functions are unclear. They were associated with mostly eleventh- to thirteenth-century sherds. In addition, numerous investigations at small sites within the Anglo-Saxon ramparts, mostly watching briefs and evaluations, as well as test pits ('urban garden archaeology'),[52] have yielded similar sherds, indicating later Anglo-Saxon settlement (and, by inference, burgage

[46] O. Creighton and N. Christie, 'The Archaeology of Wallingford Castle: A Summary of the Current State of Knowledge', in K.S.B. Keats-Rohan et al. (eds.) *Wallingford: The Castle and the Town*, pp. 9–19.

[47] 'fysshameles': *Cal. Close, 1364–8*, p. 195.

[48] N. Christie and O. Creighton, 'Wallingford in Focus', in Christie et al., *Transforming Townscapes*, pp. 1–14.

[49] I. Soden, 'Archaeological Excavations at the Former St Martin's Churchyard, Wallingford', unpublished Northamptonshire Archaeology report, 10/157 (2010).

[50] B. Durham, 'A Pre-Conquest Half-Cellar at Wallingford: Excavations at 9–10 St Martin's Street, 1979–80', in Christie et al., *Transforming Townscapes*, pp. 124–37.

[51] G. Speed and M. Edgeworth, 'Trench 3: Kinecroft (2008)', in Christie et al., *Transforming Townscapes*, pp. 304–15.

[52] N. Christie et al., 'Investigating the Townscape and Hinterland: Methods and Sources', in Christie et al., *Transforming Townscapes*, pp. 22–8.

plots) widely within the *burh* by the tenth century,[53] but they have provided little or no evidence for plot boundaries. Indeed, test pits are unlikely to provide such evidence because they are usually dug within backyards, not across boundaries, although those in rectangular plots could reveal former strip plots that have become lost. However, excavations in other medieval English towns[54] have shown it is possible to examine burgage plot boundaries, for example in Henley,[55] Marlow,[56] Newbury,[57] Banbury,[58] Burford,[59] and Bicester;[60] but there are few records from *burhs* – for example, Bedford[61] and Wilton[62] – hence the value of this study.

Is there a connection between boundaries of burgages and of parishes? Some present-day parish boundaries cross the Anglo-Saxon ramparts (Fig. 1, F in the north, G in the south-west), probably because they pre-date *burh* formation, but those within the ramparts largely lie along streets and burgage boundaries. Some of their irregularities of shape (for example, HI, JKL and MN in Fig. 1) almost certainly reflect former medieval parishes that were absorbed into their neighbours during the fourteenth century.[63] Where they follow plot boundaries there may have been lanes that have since become lost.

According to Domesday Book, only eight *hagae* (enclosed burgage plots) were destroyed to make space for the Norman castle, suggesting that the north-eastern quarter had few Anglo-Saxon burgage plots. This is consistent with a royal presence there. What more can be said about the original (tenth-century) plots elsewhere in the *burh*? What were they like? Where and when were they formed? And who held them? Domesday Book records that Wallingford had become the county town of Berkshire. Just before the Conquest, King Edward the Confessor received dues from 276 closes,[64] many of which must have been small in order to fit into the space available. In addition, there were local lords who had tenements attached to their rural manors. Among these were Walkelin, bishop of Winchester, who had twenty-seven belonging to his manor of Brightwell, centred a few kilometres west of Wallingford. Some of these were probably clustered, in the way they were recorded much later in the town surveys of 1548 and 1606. Miles Crispin had some fifty tenements belonging to various manors, of which twenty messuages (dwelling houses) belonged to the manor of *Neunham* (later Newnham Murren). Many of his tenements must have been very compact, as exemplified by

[53] For a review of the evidence: N. Christie and M. Edgeworth, 'Town, House and Hearth: Tracing Wallingford's Medieval Population', in Christie et al., *Transforming Townscapes*, pp. 299–342.

[54] For a review, see C. Dyer, 'The Archaeology of Medieval Small Towns'.

[55] J. Pine, 'The Excavation of Medieval and Post-Medieval Features at the Rear of 42c Bell Street, Henley, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 67 (1999), pp. 255–74.

[56] S. Underdown, '23–25 High Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire', unpublished Oxford Archaeology report (2008).

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[60] P.A. Harding and P. Andrews, 'Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Settlement at Chapel Street, Bicester: Excavations 1999–2000', *Oxoniensia*, 62 (2002), pp. 141–79.

[61] M. Edgeworth, 'Comparing *Burh*s: A Wallingford–Bedford Case Study', in Keats-Rohan and Roffe (eds.), *The Origins of the Borough of Wallingford*, pp. 77–85.

[62] P. Andrews et al. 'Excavations at Wilton, 1995–6: St John's Hospital and South Street', *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 93 (2000), pp. 181–204.

[63] St Mary-the-Less, St John upon the Water and St Michael into St Peter; Holy Trinity and St Martin into St Mary-the-More; and St Lucian and St Rumbold into St Leonard. Known or probable positions of churches shown in Fig. 1; Dewey, 'The Origins of Wallingford'.

[64] Such a precise number implies that occupiers had been named in a list that no longer exists: D. Roffe 'Wallingford in Domesday Book and Beyond', in Keats-Rohan and Roffe (eds.), *The Origins of the Borough of Wallingford*, pp. 27–51.

plots described as 'one acre'[65] in both Bray and Albury having eleven messuages, and another in Sutton Courtenay having six closes (perhaps without messuages). In Wallingford, it seems that one-acre (0.4 hectare) plots were the norm, similar to those uncovered by archaeological investigation in other Anglo-Saxon towns, such as Winchester and Worcester.[66] With as many as eleven messuages on an acre they probably occupied strip burgages; and the same is likely to have been the case with many of the properties of the bishop of Winchester, as well as the seven messuages that the abbot of Abingdon had on two acres of land.

By 1066 Wallingford was clearly thriving. Even eighty years earlier, around 990, it was described by Wulfstan as a 'small but busy market town',[67] an assessment supported by the presence of a mint producing coins from the time of King Æthelstan (924–939) if not earlier,[68] and by the occurrence of late Anglo-Saxon pottery sherds throughout the land within the ramparts – from 35 out of 44 test pits.[69] Quantities of these sherds were greatest (more than 25 per pit) in the following areas:

1. at the western end of the High Street, south of the Bullcroft (near the former church of Holy Trinity that became the post-Conquest Wallingford Priory);
2. the northern part of the south-eastern quarter (suggesting this was the start of the main residential area);
3. the north end of Castle Street, near the parsonage of All Hallows church that was associated with the later castle (and perhaps a pre-Conquest royal presence);
4. the Kinecroft (continuous with the residential area in the south-eastern quarter).

Sherds were similarly abundant also in one area outside the ramparts, to the south-east of the south gate near the presumed site of the former church of St Lucian. In contrast, few late Anglo-Saxon sherds were found in the north-eastern quarter or elsewhere outside the south gate (suggesting that any market there had a later, Norman origin). A few middle Anglo-Saxon sherds were found scattered both within and without the ramparts, consistent with an essentially agricultural pre-*burh* settlement.

CONCLUSIONS

It seems that the *burh*, founded in the late ninth century as a substantial fortress, had developed into a town within a few decades of its creation. Both craft production and marketing appear to have been small in scale. This is consistent with the deduced size of pre-Conquest tenements and with the recorded post-medieval structure.[70] The evidence supports the concept of rapid, planned growth in a manner as proposed by Biddle and Hill rather than the delayed appearance of burgages favoured by Holt.[71] Burgage plots were present in Wallingford from at least the time of Domesday Book and probably from soon after *burh* foundation. Cartographical analysis reveals two types of plot, strip and rectangular, and shows that plots in a *burh* are similar to those in other towns. Strip plot widths, recognisable from the earliest known large-scale map (1837), but measured from the 1876 OS map, seem to be based

65 Presumably a simple indication of area, not a precise measurement.

66 D.M. Palliser et al., 'The Topography of Towns 600–1300', in Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. 1, pp. 153–6; R. Holt, 'The Urban Transformation in England, 900–1100', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 32 (2009), pp. 57–78; Haslam, 'Planning in Late Saxon Worcester'.

67 M. Lapidge and M. Winterbottom, *Wulfstan of Winchester: The Life of St. Æthelwold* (1991), pp. 64–6.

68 G. Williams and T. Williams, 'Minting in Wallingford', in Christie et al., *Transforming Townscapes*, pp. 343–59.

69 As at April 2017. A systematic analysis has yet to be made of the age, distribution and significance of Anglo-Saxon sherds from the pits of the 'urban garden archaeology' programme, as well as from other sites.

70 See, for example, Pedgley, 'Rents as Indicators'.

71 M. Biddle and D. Hill, 'Late Saxon Planned Towns', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 51 (1971), pp. 70–85; Holt, 'Urban Transformation'.

on a 'unit' of around 20–24 feet (6–7 metres). Evidence for the persistence of plot boundaries comes from three sources. First, a detailed town survey of 1548 indicates a very similar unit width – around 22 feet (6.5 metres). The areas of these plots were almost wholly less than one rood (a quarter acre, 0.1 hectare). Rectangular plots had areas most commonly of one rood, with the next most common half a rood or one and a half roods. Second, a similar survey of 1606 shows a dominant size of one rood, as in 1548, and almost all others were either two roods or some fraction of one rood. Third, around half the town properties leased from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries had unchanging widths greater than 50 feet (15 metres). In addition, eight strip plots in St Mary's Street and High Street give some support for a unit around 20 feet (6 metres). Along St Leonard's Lane south side, another eight small plots had an average width 22 feet (6.5 metres), suggesting that the town returned here to using the old unit to divide previously open, waste land, almost certainly after the Civil War.

The distributions of strip plots and properties paying quit rents to the borough fee farm (fixed from medieval times) are similar, and likewise the distributions of rectangular plots and properties paying borough lease rents. One can therefore argue that there was a zoning of properties, with smaller, strip plots mostly confined to the main north–south and east–west roads, while the larger, rectangular plots tended to be borough properties and were more widely spread. Strip plots could be limited by back lanes (for example, Wood Street) whereas rectangular plots were not, presumably because access was possible from street frontages only partly built up, as with St Martin's Street and Goldsmiths Lane. A suggested imposition of the market place west of St Mary's Street may have been around the time of the westward displacement of Castle Street in the late thirteenth century to accommodate the addition of a third bailey to the castle, and also the time of transfer of the corn market from outside the south gate between 1272 and 1325.

This study has helped to clarify the nature and continuity of burgage plots in an Anglo-Saxon *burh*, although much of it has been based on the documentary record rather than archaeology. There is a need for further excavations across plot boundaries to test the results presented here, and there is also a need to examine the difference, if any, in the dating of the formation of plots and streets. Additionally, we await a detailed analysis of finds from the test pits.

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