

# THE WALLINGFORD BURH TO BOROUGH RESEARCH PROJECT

## AN EXPLORATION OF THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF A LATE SAXON AND MEDIEVAL TOWN

### From Saxon burh to medieval borough

Wallingford is one of Britain's most important early medieval and medieval townscapes. The town boasts perhaps the best example of a late Saxon town plan, late Saxon and medieval town banks and ditch defences, and the earthworks of an important royal castle. A key claim to fame is the Norman invasion force crossing the river Thames at this site to march on and capture London. The town was by then already a significant and sizeable late Saxon *burh* defending the ford at the frontiers of Wessex territory and it lay in a zone once busy with well-endowed Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and monastic seats. Despite growth and favour under the Normans exemplified in a powerful castle and a major mint, the town struggled economically after 1200 and this, by chance, has enabled the preservation of so much archaeological and standing heritage wealth.



### Introduction to the project

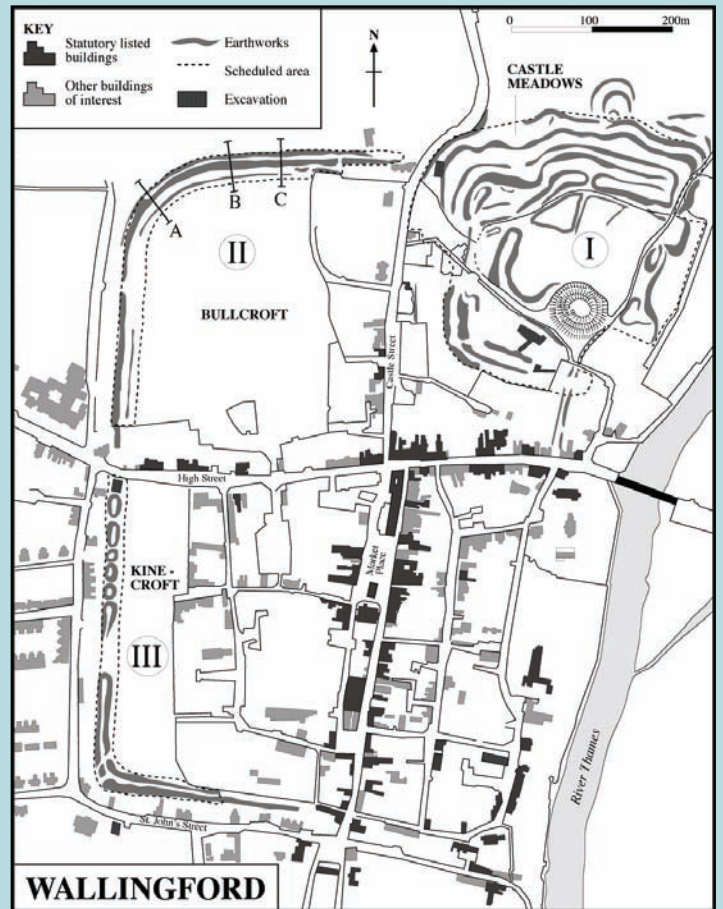
The *Wallingford Burh to Borough Research Project* seeks to learn more from this unique place. Although sampled by some (largely unpublished) excavations in the 1920s, 1960s and 1970s (identifying a Saxon cemetery, and parts of the castle complex), this project will provide a substantial new analysis of historic Wallingford. The Project began with pilot fieldwork from 2002 to 2005 and comprised short seasons of study in and around the town. The project now has extended AHRC funding for 2008-2010 enabling us to develop our work and explore more fully the crucial archaeological potential of Wallingford in the context of early medieval and medieval British urban growth and development.



### Forthcoming work

The new project phase expands significantly the previous explorations and will involve full geophysical sampling of all areas within and around Wallingford (undertaken at Easter for three years), followed by selected summer-season excavations (with University students, professional archaeologists, and local volunteers) at targeted spaces within the townscape and including garden archaeology, landscape archaeology to place the town in context, and buildings analysis. As well as day schools, public open days, related museum displays and conferences, the project will see publication of articles and monographs, the latter including the unpublished earlier excavations.

The 2008-2010 Project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and is a joint academic venture between the archaeology departments of the Universities of Leicester, Exeter and Oxford. The project is supported by Wallingford Town Council, Wallingford Museum and The Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society, South Oxfordshire District Council, the Northmoor Trust, Oxfordshire County Archaeology Service, English Heritage, the Ashmolean Museum and Reading Museum; the pilot project was funded by the British Academy, the Medieval Settlement Research Group and the Marc Fitch Fund, and with logistical support from the universities of Leicester and Exeter.



The important open spaces of the town – Castle Meadows (I), the Bullcroft (II), and the Kinecroft (III) mean that we can use geophysical survey to hunt for the priory, the lost church of St. Peter, former streets, and Saxon and Norman house plots.

### Our work so far

Preliminary studies have so far been made in the Bullcroft and Castle; in 2002 the Kinecroft and the Riverside Meadows were examined and a trench in Queen's Arbour revealed a previously unknown medieval chalk-built wharf. In 2004 following up geophysical results on the Riverside Meadows, a potential small motte was excavated which may be linked to a siegework—perhaps related to the 1140s Anarchy when Wallingford was the centre of repeated sieges.

### Research questions

A series of major questions underpins this major archaeological research project:

- What are the historical contexts of Wallingford's origins, growth and its subsequent medieval decay?
- What do previous excavations and historic maps tell us of medieval urban growth and evolution?
- What was the nature of the late Saxon town and what preceded this?
- What is the evolution of the castle and its complex array of earthworks; are these all defensive?
- What features underlie the modern open spaces of the Bullcroft and Kinecroft – are traces of Saxon and medieval housing and public space preserved?
- What was Wallingford's landscape context? How active was the late Saxon and medieval countryside?
- What should future archaeological steps be to enhance Wallingford's rich heritage?