

Chapter 2: Synthesis and Discussion

By Anne Dodd

with contributions by Julian Munby and David R P Wilkinson

The excavations and observations considered in this volume form the most substantial body of archaeological evidence yet presented for the origins and development of Oxford before the emergence of the university at the turn of the 13th century. A number of syntheses have been published previously (Jope 1956a; Hassall 1986; Blair 1994), each able to build on more evidence than the last, and each of great significance in underpinning the evolving strategy that has informed archaeological research in Oxford for the last 40 years. The present chapter benefits from a further decade of archaeological work in the city centre, and from the full publication in the current volume of a number of significant earlier excavations. New discoveries continue to be made, and the most important results from very recent excavations have been incorporated in this chapter in advance of their full publication elsewhere. Many uncertainties remain in the archaeology of Saxon and Norman Oxford, and the present chapter cannot pretend to offer a definitive interpretation. The aim of the authors has been to clarify the nature of the evidence, the differing theories and interpretations, and the balance of likelihood. In addition, any review of this nature provides an opportunity to reassess the present state of knowledge, and suggest lines of enquiry for the future.

All sites referred to in this chapter that revealed significant mid Saxon to Norman archaeology are summarised in the Gazetteer, which forms Appendix 1 to this volume, and their location is shown on the accompanying map. For other sites, appropriate bibliographic references are given. All radiocarbon dates are quoted at the two sigma (95%) confidence level, and full details can be found in Appendix 2 to this volume.

OXFORD BEFORE THE BURH

There is little doubt that Oxford's origins as an urban place lie in the Anglo-Saxon period. First mentioned by name in 911–12, the town developed as a fortified *burh* around the turn of the 10th century, and it occurs as such in the Burghal Hidage, a memorandum of fortified places under the control of the kings of Wessex, which is currently thought to date from the period 914–19. There is increasing evidence that the *burh* at Oxford was not laid out on an empty site, but that it was developed to guard and enhance an important mid Saxon crossing of the river Thames on the boundary between Wessex and Mercia, and on the main land route from the midlands to Winchester and the south coast. However, there was no Roman town at Oxford, nor is there at present any evidence

that there was a focus of settlement at Oxford at that time or in the Iron Age. The success of the medieval town and its university casts a long shadow over the earlier history of the site; in physical terms as the growing town covered over or destroyed the remains of earlier societies, but also in terms of the focus of archaeological research in Oxford, which has been chiefly directed at the Anglo-Saxon period. It is perhaps worth recalling here, in Tom Hassall's words (1986, 116), that Oxford has a classic Upper Thames siting, at the junction of the Thames with one of its tributaries, at a location with ample agricultural potential able to exploit the free-draining Second Gravel Terrace for arable, and the floodplain, or First Terrace, for pasture. For much of its history, the area that became the town of Oxford was an unexceptional element in the Upper Thames Valley landscape, with the same evidence for land clearance, subsistence agriculture and the activities and settlements of dispersed farming communities as any number of other places. Other places rose to prominence as focal points, both before and after the mid Saxon period: Wallingford, Dorchester-on-Thames and Abingdon to the south and south-east, Alchester to the north-east, Cassington, Eynsham and Stanton Harcourt to the north-west. Quite how, when and why Oxford came to dominate its region is a question that is central to this chapter, and which will be considered in detail below, but it may be of value first of all to review the evidence for settlement at Oxford before the mid Saxon period.

Neolithic and Bronze Age (Figs 2.1, 2.2)

The evidence for the evolution of the Thames floodplain and river channels south of the medieval town is reviewed by Mark Robinson in Chapter 3 of this volume. In summary, it is likely that up until the late Bronze Age the Thames floodplain would have been drier than subsequently, when a rise in the water table led to the onset of seasonal flooding by the middle Iron Age. Evidence for Neolithic activity in the area of the medieval town is slowly increasing, although no particular concentrations are apparent. Prehistoric material, albeit not closely datable, has been found at Christ Church, at the south edge of the Second Gravel Terrace (Sturdy 1961/2a); a Beaker sherd and ten flint flakes and blades were found at Church Street between 1967 and 1970, and flint flakes were also found in excavations at Littlegate in 1971 (Hassall *et al.* 1989). Excavations on the floodplain at the Hamel to the west of the city centre in 1975–6 (Palmer 1980) located a pit filled with late Beaker pottery, animal bone and flint flakes, together

Oxford Before the University

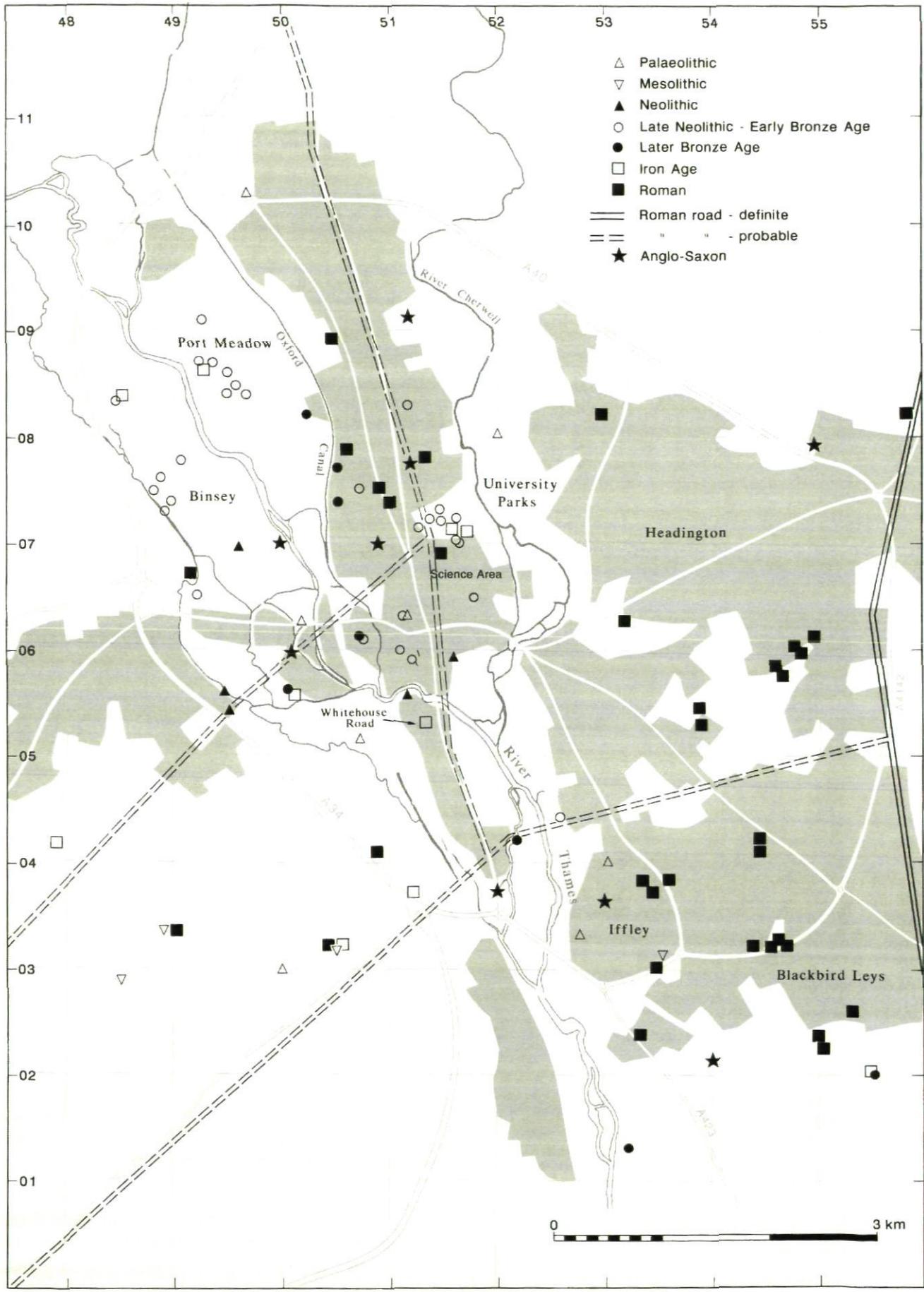


Figure 2.1 The prehistoric, Roman and early Anglo-Saxon archaeology of Oxford: principal sites and findspots.

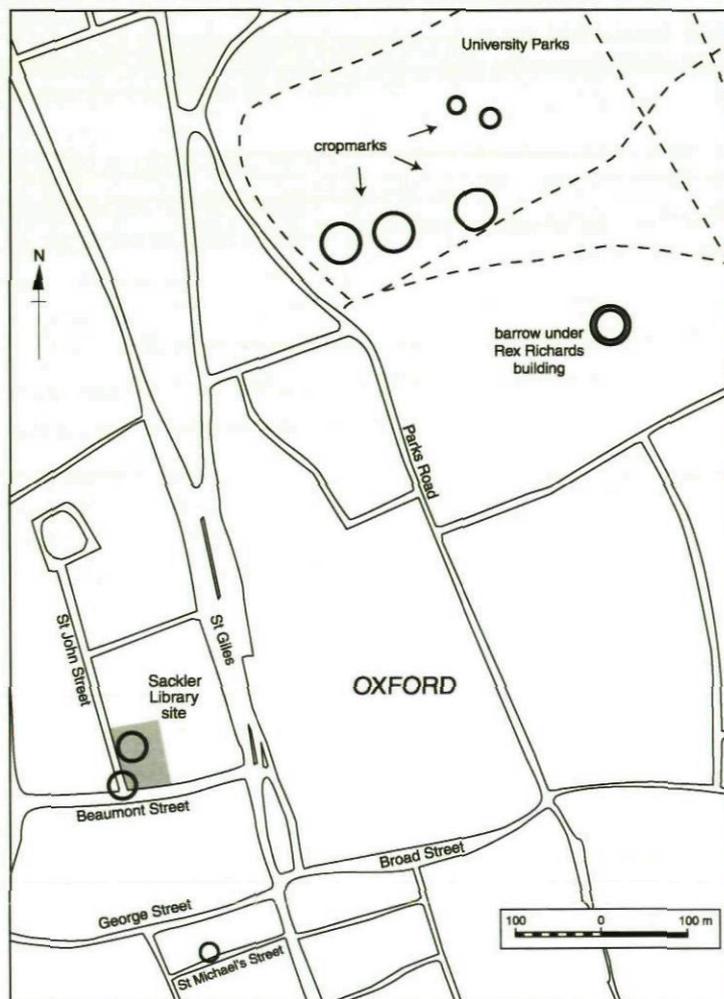


Figure 2.2 Bronze Age barrows in North Oxford (first published in D Poore and D R P Wilkinson *Beaumont Palace and the White Friars: excavations at the Sackler Library, Beaumont Street, Oxford*, OAU Occasional Paper 9, 2001, fig. 13).

with the skeleton of a young child, which is likely to represent a ritual burial. A series of possible ard or ploughmarks were also recorded, associated with artefacts of earlier second millennium date and an early Bronze Age gold strip. The gold strip may have come from the hilt of a dagger, and is one of only three finds of gold of this date known in the county; it is suggestive of high-status activity (Alistair Barclay, pers. comm.). Three further Beaker burials are known from the city, all in North Oxford (Kinnes and Longworth 1985, 139, UN.48). Outside the medieval town to the east, excavations at Jowett Walk recovered 15 pieces of undiagnostic struck flint (Roberts 1995). Most recently, Neolithic pits containing flints have been found in two recent excavations in the University Science Area (Booth and Hayden 2000; Poore and Charles in prep.).

During the early Bronze Age, if not before, it is clear that a substantial ritual focus developed at Oxford (Fig. 2.2). Parchmarks seen in the University Parks during the hot summer of 1976 revealed a long sequence of use, throughout the prehistoric period into Roman times (Hassall 1986, fig. 12). Linear

marks similar to a cursus appeared (Case 1986, 26), and parchmarks of a number of round barrows were also identified. To the south and south-east five further barrows have been excavated; at Logic Lane (Radcliffe 1961/2), in the University Science Area, at 24a St Michael's Street, and close to the junction of Beaumont Street and St John Street (Parkinson *et al.* 1996; Poore and Wilkinson 2001). Mollusc evidence from the primary fill of the northern barrow at Beaumont Street suggested a contemporary local environment of dry, open ground, implying that the land had been cleared by the time the barrows were constructed.

Barrows to the north-west of the city at Port Meadow were located by aerial survey in 1933 (Atkinson 1942; further work noted in *Oxoniensia* 8/9 for 1943–4 and in *Oxoniensia* 11/12 for 1946–7; Benson and Miles 1974, map 28; Lambrick and McDonald 1985). Parchmarks representing at least six Bronze Age ring ditches are known here, and small-scale sampling of the ditches has been carried out. Further aerial survey in 1947 identified another site at Binsey, approximately 1 km to the south-west

on the opposite side of the river Thames (Rhodes 1949; Benson and Miles 1974, map 28). A large group of ring ditches is visible here, one possibly associated with a trapezoidal enclosure. Three further barrows were located in 1978, and partially excavated in 1979, some 3 km north-west of Port Meadow at King's Weir, Wytham (Bowler and Robinson 1980).

The concentration of barrow cemeteries on the gravels of the Upper Thames is well known, and has recently been considered in detail by Alistair Barclay (Barclay and Halpin 1999, 320–25). The cemetery at Oxford can be seen as forming part of a group of at least ten cemeteries in the region, along a 50 km stretch of the river from Standlake in the north-west, to North Stoke in the south-east. As at Oxford, most of the cemeteries occur on the Second Gravel Terrace, and a number are, like Oxford, located near river confluences. The larger cemeteries, with which Oxford belongs, are located at irregular intervals, between 5 and 10 km apart. Current research suggests that these cemeteries may have formed a major element in ritual and social/economic centres established by small communities distributed along the valleys of the Thames and its tributaries, with the barrows marking the graves of leading members of those groups (pers. comm. Alistair Barclay). It has been observed elsewhere in the Upper Thames Valley (Barclay *et al.* 1996) that barrows seem to delineate the edge of an area of space that was kept clear and open for grazing animals and possibly for other activities undertaken at the ritual centre, and it is suggested that the spaces may have been respected by subsequent Iron Age communities. This is an interesting hypothesis for future research at Oxford, where no evidence of Iron Age occupation has been recovered anywhere within the medieval town.

A prehistoric ford at Oxford? by David R P Wilkinson

One of the most enigmatic and interesting features yet found on the line of the Thames crossing south of the medieval town was a layer of rolled, rounded Corallian ragstone pebbles found during deep tunnelling in St Aldate's (BT Tunnel, feature 11 on Fig. 3.32; see Chapter 3 below for a full report). This was initially interpreted as a ford and has prompted much speculation about whether an early prehistoric crossing could have existed at Oxford. The feature is not securely dated. It overlay a grey gravelly clay deriving from a river channel of slow-flowing water that was radiocarbon dated to the Mesolithic (OxA-4354), but there was no dating evidence from the pebbles, and the channel fill above (layer 9) was radiocarbon dated to the mid Saxon period (cal AD 560–890; OxA-4353) (Table A2.2). The possibility of a natural rather than an artificial formation cannot be completely discounted, particularly as iron- and lime-cemented gravel can occur naturally within the Thames gravel (Sandford 1924, 144; Powell, pers. comm.). However, against this can be set the fact that the stone was observed as forming a single, neat

layer of large pebbles, which would be very regular for a natural formation, and the fact that Corallian ragstone is not a common constituent of the floodplain gravels.

Environmental evidence suggests that there would have been a depth of 0.45 m of water over the surface in the summer during the earlier part of the Bronze Age, but that the surface would have become unusable by the late Bronze Age or early Iron Age following a rise of at least 0.80 m in the permanent water table (see Robinson, Chapter 3, below; Campbell, Chapter 3, below). The surface could therefore plausibly have provided a means of access from the south to the early Bronze Age barrow cemeteries discussed above. The possibility of an earlier date cannot be ruled out, as Bronze Age barrow cemeteries in the Upper Thames Valley are often found to re-use Neolithic ritual sites (Alistair Barclay pers. comm.). An artist's impression of the Thames Crossing area during the later Bronze Age and early Iron Age is reproduced as Figure 3.11a of this volume.

The Iron Age (Fig. 2.1)

The Iron Age in the Upper Thames Valley has been extensively studied, and the evidence suggests that people exploited relatively wide territories, with evidence for agricultural specialisation (for recent syntheses of Oxfordshire evidence see Miles 1986; Miles 1997; Allen 2000). The First Gravel Terrace was used for pasture; areas in the floodplain seem to have been used seasonally, while drier areas seem to have supported more permanent pastoral settlements. The higher Second Gravel Terrace was exploited for arable farming, and may have supported a larger number of settlements. Occupation is also evident on the hill slopes. Information for the immediate vicinity of Oxford is rather patchy, as opportunities for large-scale excavation have not been available. However, a considerable body of data collected through aerial survey, small-scale evaluation and excavation, and field survey suggests that the Oxford area was typical of the region.

Hill slope sites have been identified on the west of the city at Wytham Hill (Mytum 1986), at the top of the nearby Hinksey Hill (Myres 1930; Hinksey Hill OAU unpubl. client report) and at Cumnor, Hurst Hill (Wallis 1983). Similar settlements may have existed on the opposite side of the city.

A number of possibly complementary sites have been identified in the valley bottom. The best understood of these is the middle Iron Age settlement at Whitehouse Road (Gaz No. 116), dating from the 3rd to the 1st century BC, which lay on a gravel island in the floodplain of the Thames south of the medieval town (Mudd 1993). Further evidence for Iron Age farming on the floodplain in this area comes from an environmental sample (OXTMS 85/3) taken from a brown silty peat at 89–91 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 96), radiocarbon dated to 760–50 cal BC (HAR-8361; Table A2.2; site report Chapter 3, below;

environmental report Chapter 7 below). Seeds suggested the nearby presence of wet grassland or grazed marsh. Although there was no evidence for human occupation, the presence of the scarabs *Aphodius rufipes* and *Onthophagus ovatus* was strongly suggestive of domestic animals nearby, these being beetles that feed on the droppings of herbivores on pasture. Aerial survey and limited excavation has identified three middle Iron Age farmsteads with associated enclosures at Port Meadow that were involved with specialised pastoralism (Lambrick and McDonald 1985, 98–9), and a group of possible Iron Age enclosures on the opposite side of the river at Binsey (Rhodes 1949; Benson and Miles 1974, map 28). Parchmarks in the University Parks revealed a concentration of enclosures which may well be of Iron Age and Roman date. Small-scale excavations immediately to the south in the University Science Area have located a small number of ditches and pits with finds suggesting early, middle and late Iron Age activity (Parkinson *et al.* 1996; Poore and Charles in prep.).

In the late Iron Age, the Upper Thames Valley was a frontier zone between three different tribal groupings, the Dobunni to the west, the Atrebates to the south and the Catuvellauni to the east. Coin distributions suggest that the Cherwell and the Thames below the confluence at Oxford may have formed a significant boundary between the Dobunni and the Catuvellauni, although the evidence is less clear for boundaries to the south with the Atrebates. A number of 'valley forts' or 'enclosed oppida' appear in the region at this time and seem to have been associated with the defence of Thames tributaries: Salmonsbury on the Windrush, the Big Enclosure at Cassington on the Evenlode, Abingdon on the Ock, and Dorchester Dyke Hills on the Thame. None has yet been identified on the Cherwell, and there is no evidence for any such defensive enclosure at Oxford.

Roman (Fig. 2.1)

The Roman settlement tended to perpetuate late Iron Age territorial groupings, and the Oxford area thus remained peripheral, between the major towns of the Atrebates, the Dobunni and the Catuvellauni at Silchester, Cirencester and Verulamium respectively. The archaeology of Roman Oxfordshire has recently been extensively reviewed (Henig and Booth 2000). Two small towns were established near Oxford, at Alchester to the north-east, and Dorchester-on-Thames to the south-east, connected by a Roman road that runs through the eastern edge of modern Oxford. Alchester was the site of a substantial Conquest-period Roman fort, from which the town probably developed; Dorchester was a significant centre of late Iron Age occupation (see above), and evidence suggests there may also have been an early Roman military presence there (Frere 1984, 94–8). There is no evidence for any Roman town at Oxford.

Apart from the known road connecting Alchester and Dorchester, the identification of Roman roads in the vicinity of Oxford is more speculative, but it is possible that there was a north-south road roughly along the alignment of the present Banbury Road, which is described as a *portstrete* in a charter of 1004 relating to Cutteslowe (CSF 2–9). Blair suggested (1994, 88–9) that this road may have continued southwards along the line of the modern Parks Road, Catte Street and Oriel Street, to cross the Thames at the site of a possible ford (Gaz No. 17a) seen south of Christ Church in the 19th century. From here, the road would have converged on the line of the medieval crossing along Grandpont and the modern Abingdon Road.

At Redbridge/Cold Harbour, at the southern extremity of the modern city, such a road might have joined a second proposed Roman road running south-west to north-east, possibly forming a link between the Icknield Way a little to the west of Wantage and the Alchester-Dorchester road mentioned above (Lambrick 1969, 83–7). Reaching the modern southern limit of the city, this road may have crossed the river at Redbridge, at a ford or fords known to the Saxons as *Stanford* and *Maegtheford*. Continuing northeastwards, the road may have made a double river crossing at the site of the present Donnington Bridge, known in Saxon times as *Langford*. From here it would have continued to its intersection with the Alchester-Dorchester road.

A third Roman road is shown on the OS Map of Roman Britain, following a more northerly alignment. It is proposed that this road might have forked south-westwards from the 'Banbury Road' to cross the Thames at North Hinksey, continuing south-westwards towards the temple site at Frilford (Lambrick 1969, 88–9, 93).

During the Roman period, Oxford was the centre of a major pottery industry that began in the 1st century and continued until the very end of the Roman period in the late 4th and early 5th centuries. The kilns and other manufacturing sites of this industry have been located over an extensive area east of the modern city, from Woodeaton some 2 km north-east of Oxford, to Dorchester-on-Thames some 7 km to the south-east. The densest concentrations of production sites have been located in the modern eastern suburbs of the city itself, but the industry clearly did not extend as far west as the medieval town.

The most substantial evidence for Roman settlement has been identified in the area of the University Museum and the University Science Area, immediately south and west of the parchmark complexes in the University Parks. Excavations at the Radcliffe Science Library extension (Hassall 1972), at Mansfield College (Booth and Hayden 2000) and at the New Chemistry Research Laboratory (Poore and Charles in prep.) suggest a settlement of rural character, probably a farm and associated fields. There is no known Roman site within the area of the medieval walled town. Very small quantities of

Roman pottery are often recovered, but could derive from the farm noted above. The most interesting and substantial finds to date have been Roman tile (including tegulae, a pila and a scored box tile) from Church Street, St Ebbe's (Hassall *et al.* 1989, 90, 196 and fig. 43), and Roman brick at the site of Oxford Castle, slightly to the north (Jope 1952/3, 99–100). Mortar that is almost certainly Roman in date was recovered from the Saxon rampart at 24A St Michael's St (this volume, Chapter 4).

Evidence has also been recovered for settlement on the hill slopes around the city. The evaluation at Hinksey Hill Farm to the south-west of Oxford (OAU unpubl. client report 1991) revealed settlement of the early Roman period which may have extended into the later Roman period. Work in 1976–7 at Chilswell Farm, approximately 1 km west of the evaluation, had previously located the site of a probable Roman villa. An *opus signinum* floor was found, together with a small quantity of roof, floor and flue fragments, six tile tesserae and some painted wall plaster (Donald and Crawford 1986).

Early Saxon (Fig. 2.1)

The Upper Thames Valley was an early centre of Anglo-Saxon settlement, with evidence from burials at Abingdon and Dorchester suggesting that Saxon people were moving into the area from the early 5th century. By the 6th century Saxon settlement is to be found all along the Upper Thames gravel terraces, from Stanton Harcourt in the north-west to Wallingford in the south-east. The main focus seems to have been to the south of Oxford, centred on the territory between Abingdon and the Roman small town of Dorchester-on-Thames, where the first bishopric of the West Saxons was established in about 635. A combination of cropmark and cemetery evidence suggests that a very high status settlement probably existed here, in the area of Sutton Courtenay and Drayton. At this time the Upper Thames Valley was under the control of the successful and expansionist Gewisse (or West Saxons) and the Oxford area must have come under their domination. From the middle of the 7th century, however, increasing Mercian aggression seems to have undermined the Gewisse in the Upper Thames Valley, and the focus of West Saxon power, including the bishopric, shifted southwards to Hampshire and Winchester. Thereafter, for some two hundred years, the Oxford region was again marginal territory, fought over by the Mercians and the West Saxons, and for much of the time under Mercian control. An authoritative survey of the Anglo-Saxon period in Oxfordshire was published recently by John Blair (1994).

Archaeological evidence for the early Saxon presence at Oxford remains very slight. The only settlement yet located has recently been excavated on the extreme south-eastern outskirts of the modern city, at Oxford Science Park, Littlemore. Six sunken featured buildings have been found, and shallow remains of possible timber framed structures were

also present. The pottery suggests that the site was occupied during the 6th century, and did not carry on much beyond the early 7th century (Moore 2000a). The settlement is in a classic location for the Upper Thames Valley, near a small stream overlooking the Thames. The only other evidence for a possible Saxon presence near the Thames on the east of the city is a bronze and garnet S-shaped brooch, probably a Frankish import of the 6th century, which was found in unknown circumstances at Iffley, and is now in the British Museum.

No early Saxon occupation is known from the area of the medieval walled town, but sufficient evidence is available to suggest an early Saxon presence to the north and north-east of the medieval town, within and around the areas of known Roman settlement (see above). This consists almost entirely of chance finds of burials and associated objects, mostly recovered during suburban building campaigns of the 19th century in North Oxford. A cemetery may have existed at the site of the Radcliffe Infirmary (Dickinson 1976, vol II, no. 114, Oxford I), and there may have been another slightly to the north-west in Kingston Road, where 10 skeletons were discovered during building works in the 1870s. One of these is said to have been buried with a knife, but it is not certain that they were Anglo-Saxon. More burials have been discovered north of the University Parks in the vicinity of Park Town and Crick Road (Dickinson 1976, vol. II, no. 115, Oxford II). The latter site produced a spearhead and two shield bosses dating from the late 5th century into the 6th century. Dickinson notes the presence of Roman burials in the area and suggests that there may be a scatter of mixed Roman and Saxon graves here (1976, vol. II, 189). Further burials of late 5th- to early 6th-century date have been found further to the north, in Summertown (Dickinson 1976, vol. II, nos 116–17, Oxford III and IV).

Evidence from other areas of Oxford is scarce. Early Saxon sherds and a possible feature were identified during excavations at Dean Court Farm, in a valley between Cumnor Hill and Wytham Hill on the western outskirts of the modern city (Allen 1994, 288–9), and a 5th-century cremation urn now in the Ashmolean Museum was found at Osney, just west of the city centre. On the higher ground to the north-east of the city there is a hint of early Saxon occupation at Headington, where a *grubenhaus* was reportedly found in 1931, containing Anglo-Saxon pottery, and with an unaccompanied burial in the bottom.

An early Saxon crossing at Oxford?

Deep tunnelling at the south end of St Aldate's (BT Tunnel, see Chapter 3 below) identified a second early crossing (feature 111 on Fig. 3.32), a stone surface that seems to have been in use during the early Saxon period, or the early part of the mid Saxon period. The dating evidence was ambiguous and the argument for a Saxon date for the stone

surface depends on the model for the development of the Thames floodplain at Oxford (see Robinson, Chapter 3). This suggests that increasing arable agriculture on the slopes of the catchment during the late Iron Age and Roman period led to extensive alluviation downstream, following seasonal flooding. As a result, substantial deposits of inorganic blue alluvial clay were laid down on the floodplain, forming seasonally flooded islands set amongst stretches of permanent water. Stone surface 111 was set into the top of one of these islands; the stones covered an area measuring at least 4.5 m from east to west and were probably laid to reinforce the island's surface for traffic. A black organic gravelly loam (layer 110) formed over the stones, and analysis of an environmental sample (13) from this layer suggested that it accumulated on a surface which was wet, but above water level for at least part of the year (Robinson, Chapter 7). This suggests a causeway that became a ford in wet periods. Subsequently alluviation recommenced in the mid Saxon period, covering the stones with a further accumulation of silt (104). Within this silt, on the top of the stones, was a plank comprising a radially split segment from an oak tree felled in the period 577–619 (sample BT823; see Hillam and Miles, Chapter 7 and Table A2.1).

Unfortunately this does not provide conclusive dating evidence for an early Saxon crossing, since there is no way of knowing how much time elapsed between the felling of this wood and its coming to rest in the silt above the stones. It is also possible, given that a plank would normally float away under the wet conditions leading to silt deposition, that it was pushed into the silt from above. However, on present evidence the stone surface can only have been laid down after the end of the Roman period and before or during the mid Saxon period, and it is thus probably the earliest element yet known of the Saxon river crossing.

The plank may not be able to provide a conclusive date for the stone surface, but it might, nevertheless, reasonably be taken as evidence for human activity in the vicinity around the turn of the 7th century. Dung beetles present in sample 13 suggested a significant presence of domestic animals in the vicinity prior to the resumption of alluviation. There was also slight evidence for human habitation in the vicinity, or at least the dumping of settlement refuse; Robinson notes the presence of the beetle *Ptinus fur*, which tends to occur in indoor habitats, and frond fragments (*Pteridium aquilinum*) from bracken that grows on the hills above Oxford, but which was brought to sites in the valley bottom, perhaps for use as bedding.

In the northern part of the Thames crossing study area, at the Police Station site, part of the east bank of another alluvial island was found (see Chapter 3, below). Cattle hoof prints were found in the surface of the silt bank (48), and these were subsequently sealed by further silting. Although there is no dating evidence for the bank or the silting, it suggests that at

some point after the Roman period, and before the onset of renewed alluviation in the mid Saxon period, the chain of alluvial islands was being used as a crossing for stock.

The mid Saxon period (Fig. 2.3)

When Jope wrote his seminal study of Saxon Oxford and its region he noted that there was no archaeological or written evidence to require a date earlier than the 9th century for the origins of the town of Oxford (1956a, 235–6). He drew attention, however, to two arguments previously advanced by others for the circumstances of Oxford's foundation. Some 20 years before, Stenton had published an account of the legend of St Frideswide in which he suggested that the traditional miraculous accounts of a monastery founded by the saint at Oxford in the early 8th century could have a basis in fact (1936). In the same year, Salter had published his Ford lectures (*Medieval Oxford*) in which he had argued that Oxford was laid out as a planned town around 900, by Alfred (871–899) or by his son, Edward the Elder (899–925). Jope could see merits in both ideas, but had insufficient evidence to pursue the matter further. Some 50 years after he wrote, a substantial body of evidence has been amassed to suggest that both theories are true; that a minster was established at Oxford during the mid Saxon period, and that a *burh* was subsequently created, on an enlarged site, some two hundred years later.

Archaeological evidence for mid Saxon activity at Oxford is almost exclusively restricted to the south edge of the Second Gravel Terrace and the Thames crossing beyond. It comprises evidence of three kinds; firstly for the establishment and maintenance of a river crossing at this point; secondly for settlement and activity along the line of the river crossing; and thirdly for the existence of St Frideswide's minster. An artist's impression of the river crossing in the mid Saxon period is reproduced as Figure 3.11b of this volume.

The river crossing

The starting point for any consideration of the development of the Saxon river crossing at Oxford is Robinson's analysis of the evolution of the Thames floodplain south of Oxford, which is presented in Chapter 3 of this volume. In summary, alluviation during the late Iron Age and Roman period had created a series of islands in the floodplain, set between areas of permanent water. The approximate outline and edges of two islands along the central line of the crossing have been revealed in a number of excavations in the area, and are shown in Figure 3.9, with the evidence summarised in Figure 2.3. For the purposes of this discussion, the northern island will be referred to as Island 1, and the southern as Island 2. These islands and others began to define the complex series of channels that are known to have existed in the area in later times. The channel

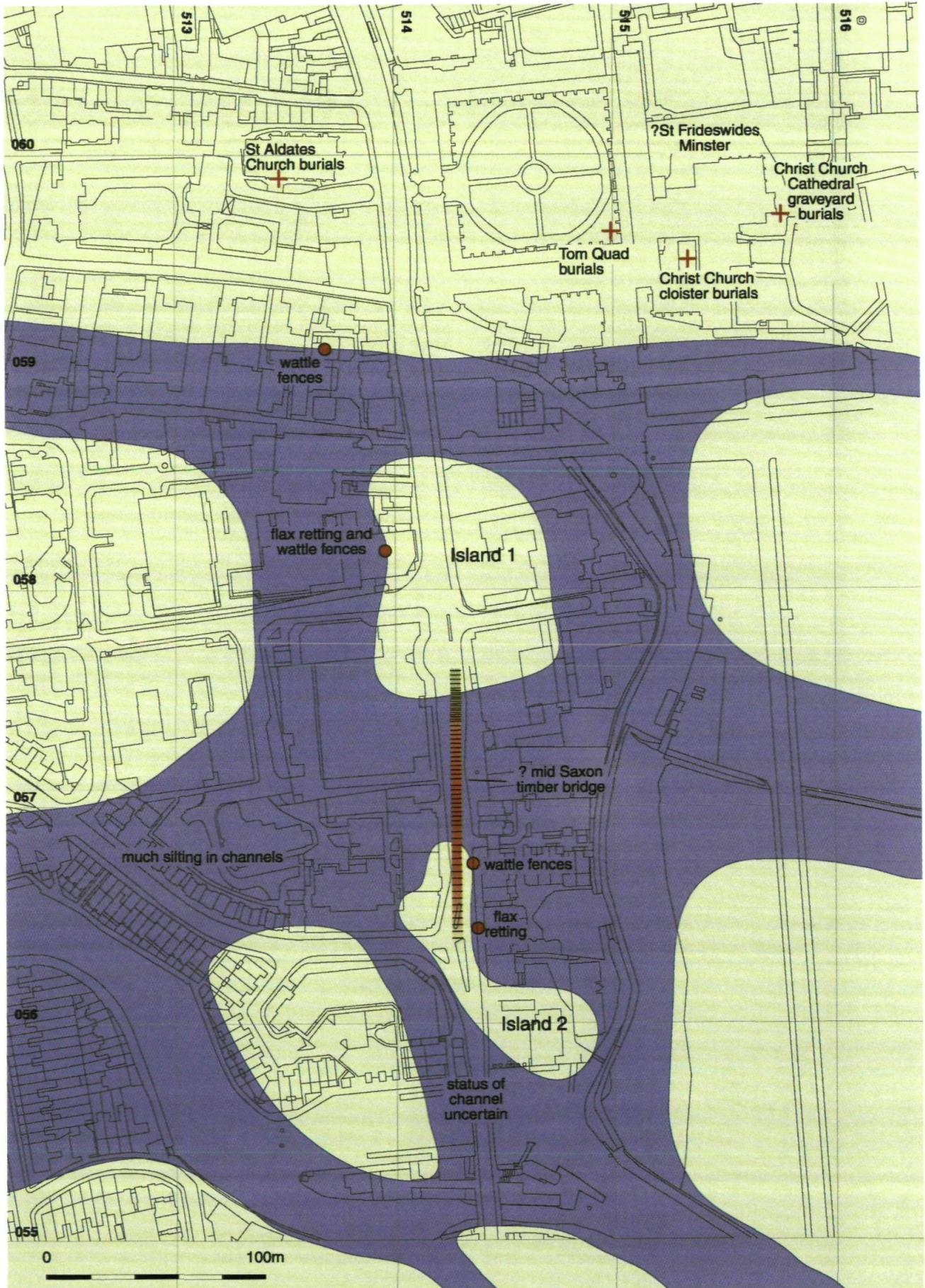


Figure 2.3 Mid Saxon Oxford.

between the north tip of Island 1 and the Second Gravel Terrace was the forerunner of the later Trill Mill Stream, while the stretch of water between Island 1 and Island 2 covers the area of the later Shire Lake channel. The status of channels to the south of Island 2 is uncertain at this time. Alluviation seems to have stopped during the early Saxon period (reflecting a substantial decrease in agricultural activity upstream), but resumed during the mid Saxon period and intensified thereafter. By the mid Saxon period, if not before (see above), it was thus possible for people and stock to cross the river, as R H C Davis has put it (1973, 262), by 'island-hopping' their way across the floodplain using a combination of alluvial islands, fords and bridges. The human effort put into preserving and enhancing this crossing is revealed by Oxford's mid Saxon archaeology.

There is now substantial evidence that a mid Saxon wooden bridge was constructed along the line of the crossing. Six timbers recovered during deep tunnelling at the south end of St Aldate's (BT Tunnel, east end of Tunnel 1; see Chapter 3 and Fig. 3.32) are very likely to derive from a bridge trestle driven into alluvial Island 2, and replacing the earlier stone surface (BT 111, see above), which had presumably been rendered unusable by a rise in the water table and renewed flooding, represented by silt layers 104 and 109. Figure 3.32 shows that five of the timbers (T821, T822, T824, T825 and T826) formed an east-west alignment and were regularly spaced at intervals of approximately 1 metre. This suggests a single trestle for a bridge at least 3.3 m wide, the top part (deck and rails) of which had been destroyed. Unfortunately none of the timbers could be dated by dendrochronology, but Timber 825 gave a radiocarbon date of cal AD 660–900 (GU-5333; Table A2.2) which, although broad, nevertheless provides good evidence that the timbers derive from a mid Saxon construction, and not from later work associated with the construction of the Norman Grandpont on the same site (see below). The possibility of a Saxon timber bridge had previously been suggested by Brian Durham, who had identified two timber piles below the stonework of the Grandpont causeway in a sewer trench beneath the modern road at 33 St Aldate's (Plate 2.1; Gaz No. 91; Durham 1984a, 87, fig. 14, fiche B12). There was no dating evidence for the timbers, and the suggestion at the time was that they were likely to be from a late Saxon structure. The form of these piles as shown in the published drawing, and their relationship to the Grandpont, are however very similar to the timbers discovered in the BT Tunnel, and suggest that there was a further trestle of the mid Saxon bridge at this point, at the northern tip of Island 2.

No other evidence is currently known for the timber bridge, although it will be evident from Figure 3.1 that opportunities for observations below the modern road surface of St Aldate's have been very limited. The other substantial evidence for the mid Saxon crossing shows that attempts were being

made to stabilise the banks and channels by revetment of their edges. At the north end of the crossing, the excavations at 89–91 St Aldate's (the Trill Mill Stream site; Gaz No. 96, full report Chapter 3, below) showed that silts indicating a rise in water level were cut away on an ENE-WSW alignment (TMS Phase 2), sloping downwards to the south, although it is unclear whether this was a natural cut caused by increased water flow, a human intervention, or perhaps a combination of both. It is clear that three successive wattle revetments lined the cut (Plate 3.1), and that radiocarbon dates from two of these show a very high probability of being before AD 900 (HAR-8363 and HAR-8364; Fig. A2.1). It has been suggested by the excavator that the cutting and revetment of the north bank may have been associated with the Trill Mill, a property of St Frideswide's Priory from c 1120, but probably much older. The mill is thought to have been located on the east side of the crossing, and its probable location is shown on Figure 3.13. Alternatively, work on the channel may have been necessary because the rising water levels were causing problems, although exactly where, and to whom, remains unclear.



Plate 2.1 Timber stake from salvage work at 33 St Aldate's, Oxford, 1979.

Excavations at 79–80 St Aldate's and at the former site of Linacre College on the opposite side of the road (Gaz Nos 94 and 98) had previously found similar evidence for early attempts to establish and maintain a river crossing. A bank of blue clay was seen, which extended across the width of St Aldate's, being recorded on both sites. The clay sealed organic silt that gave a radiocarbon date of 1010–400 cal BC (Har-209; Table A2.2). A north-south aligned gully was cut into the west edge of the bank, and lined with wattle fences; beyond the gully the bank sloped down to the channel bed, into which a further wattle fence had collapsed. There was some evidence that upcast from the gully had been used to heighten the crown of the bank. The gully and fences, and the bank surface, were rapidly sealed beneath further alluvium, following which more fences and stakes were inserted at the bank edge. On the crown of the bank was a burnt pit. Radiocarbon dates were obtained on a stake from the first phase of wattle fencing lining the gully (cal AD 660–1160; HAR-79/85), from a stake in the second phase of fencing following the alluviation (cal AD 660–1160; HAR-125), and from a charred stake from the burnt pit (cal AD 660–1030; HAR-718) (see Table A2.2).

The clay bank has been interpreted by the excavator as an artificial causeway formed by dumping clay from the line of the Trill Mill Stream to the north. Thermoluminescence dates of AD 750 ± 62 years and AD 705 ± 74 years from pottery in silt layers over the clay bank had suggested that the earlier part of the radiocarbon range might be more probable, and it was concluded, on the basis of the various historical possibilities, that 'the St Aldate's causeway was pioneered towards the end of the reign of Offa, and was associated with Mercian expansion into Berkshire' (Durham 1977, 91, 101, 174–9; 1984a, 80–81, 85–6). The alternative view, and the model followed in the present volume, is that the clay bank was part of an alluvial island (Island 1 on Fig. 2.3), and that it was substantially deposited by natural processes during the late Iron Age and Roman period (see Robinson and Lambrick in Durham 1984a, 79–80, and Robinson, this volume, Chapter 3 below). It is clear, however, that attempts were being made to stabilise the channel edge, and the 9th-century date proposed by the excavator for the gullies, the flooding and the different phases of revetment can still be supported from the evidence of other finds and particularly from the exceptionally long and well-dated stratigraphic sequence at the site.

A considerable quantity of debris was mixed with the early silt layers against the west side of Island 1. Several fragments of leather footwear were preserved in a trampled layer at the water's edge, and leather waste, a pottery spindlewhorl and a small iron knife were found in the silts that rapidly buried the first phase of fences on the site. More rubbish, including further shoes and a socketed iron arrowhead, were incorporated in the overlying silts into which the second group of fences were set. Further

flooding followed, and silts accumulating around and over the second group of fences included an iron key-bit, the base of a wooden bowl and a bone ice skate (Durham 1977, 182). Pottery, including cooking pots, bowls and shallow dishes, was also found in the early silt layers. Possible continental imports were noted amongst the groups (Haldon 1977, 132). Considerable quantities of flax seeds (*Linum usitatissimum*) were found in the early wattle-lined gully on the west bank of the island (Hedges 1977), and this is suggestive of flax retting, albeit not on a particularly efficient scale, and the production of linen cloth. (Flax retting is a process of soaking flax in water in order to free the fibres from the rest of the stem.) Flax capsule fragments were also present in the mid Saxon channel fill (9) at the BT Tunnel site. This is the channel shown east of Island 2 on Figure 2.3, and the channel fill was radiocarbon dated to the period cal AD 560–890 (OxA-4353).

A reedswamp deposit in the channel at 33 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 91) was seen at the very bottom of the excavated sequence in Trench 1b (Durham 1984a, Fig. 6, layer 11/1). This contained a wattle hurdle which Robinson notes must have pre-dated any of the late Saxon activity on the site (Chapter 3, below); it suggests the proximity of the north-east bank of Island 2 (Figure 2.3). The same reedswamp deposit also contained a large component of cereal bran, characteristic of human sewage (Durham 1984a, 77–8, sample 33L11).

Other mid Saxon evidence

There is very little sign of mid Saxon activity at Oxford other than evidence associated with the maintenance of the Thames crossing and burials at the site of St Frideswide's minster at the southern tip of the Second Gravel Terrace (see below). The identification of other pre-*burh* features, in the couple of cases where they are suggested, relies on the fact that they were sealed by the first metallised street surface, which is thought to date to the foundation of the *burh* around the turn of the 10th century. The problems inherent in this approach will be self-evident, and the dating of the earliest street surfaces is discussed in more detail below. The difficulties are compounded by the fact that, despite extensive excavation in the county, there is as yet no evidence of a distinctive mid Saxon ceramic tradition in Oxfordshire (see Mellor 1994, 36–7). Maureen Mellor has tentatively suggested that the early Saxon wares seem to persist until the introduction of late Saxon traditions, and there are numerous sites where early and late Saxon wares occur in association. Three major late Saxon ceramic traditions are clear by the late 9th century, and one (Late Saxon Oxford Ware, Fabric B) may be present by the late 8th century, but in general pottery alone cannot identify mid Saxon horizons.

The most substantial pre-*burh* feature is the presumed ditch excavated at 31–34 Church Street (Gaz No. 24), which was 3 m wide and aligned

north-south. It was clearly sealed by the earliest street surface of Church Street; it cut the natural gravel and was filled with redeposited red-brown loam topsoil. The only dating evidence came from the top fill, and conformed to the pattern noted by Maureen Mellor, comprising grass-tempered and hard sandy wares of early Saxon type (datable to the period *c* 500–700), together with sherds of St Neot's-type ware. It was suggested (Hassall *et al.* 1989, 90–93) that the ditch had probably been backfilled when the first street surface was laid out. Very slight indications of pre-*burgh* activity were identified at 8 Queen Street (Gaz No. 84; see also Chapter 5, below), again underlying gravel surfaces thought to represent the primary street surfacing of the *burgh*. The most convincing of the features comprised a probable hearth with associated areas of burning, into which three shallow postholes had been cut. Sherds of early Saxon type pottery were found redeposited in later features excavated at Christ Church Cloister (Gaz No. 23); Maureen Mellor noted in her report that these occurred in association with ceramics of 10th-century traditions, which could indicate that local middle Saxon ceramics included grass-tempered and shelly limestone fabrics (1988, 34, 38). Most recently, four sherds of Ipswich ware datable to the period 720–850 were identified from excavations on the site of the new Sackler Library in Beaumont St (Gaz No. 122). There is no evidence for any medieval occupation on the site before the construction of the royal palace of Beaumont in the 12th century, and the area presumably formed part of the extensive field system north of Oxford. The Ipswich ware may therefore have reached the site during field manuring although its source can only be a matter of conjecture.

St Frideswide's minster

There is a long, if muddled, tradition that a Mercian sub-king founded a monastery at Oxford in the early 8th century at the instigation of his saintly daughter Frideswide, who became its first abbess. The existence of St Frideswide's monastery, or minster, at Oxford is first confirmed in written sources in the early 11th century, when a charter of Ethelred II of 1004 records that 'a certain minster situated in the town called Oxford where the most blessed Frideswide rests' was 'renewed by me and mine' (CSF i, No. 2). This was in reparation for damage caused two years previously during the massacre of St Brice's day, when the Danes of Oxford had been burned in St Frideswide's church after taking refuge there. The minster's existence is subsequently confirmed by Domesday Book, which records that the canons of St Frideswide held their land in King Edward's day and in 1086. The minster was refounded as a house of regular Augustinian canons during the reign of Henry I, probably around 1120 (CSF i, No. 5, but see also Blair 1988a, 227 and n. 45), surviving until it was suppressed by Cardinal Wolsey in 1524 for the establishment of his new

foundation of Cardinal College. (On Wolsey's death in 1529 Cardinal College reverted to Henry VIII, who refounded it as Christ Church in 1532 following a short lapse in building work. The priory church became the cathedral of the new Diocese of Oxford in 1546.)

The tradition of St Frideswide survives in three 12th-century accounts: a brief account included by William of Malmesbury in his *Gesta Pontificum* and two Lives of St Frideswide, one written *c* 1100–30 by an unknown author, and the other written *c* 1140–70, probably by Master Robert of Cricklade, Prior of St Frideswide's. The Lives have been edited and reviewed in detail by Blair (1987). The accounts differ slightly, but in essence the stories tell that a sub-king called Didan ruled in the Oxford area around the late 7th century, and had a very pious daughter called Frideswide. Didan built a church at Oxford dedicated to the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary and All Saints, and Frideswide founded a community of nuns there with her father's support, and became the abbess. After Didan's death Frideswide was pursued by King Algar of Leicester, who wished to marry her. She evaded him with miraculous assistance, and fled up the Thames to Bampton (conflated with Binsey by the author of the earlier Life). Algar arrived at Oxford, was struck blind for his sins, and returned home. Frideswide remained at Bampton (or Binsey) for three years, working many miracles, before returning to her minster at Oxford. She died there (according to the earlier Life on 19 October 727), leaving orders that she was to be buried on the south side of St Mary's church, which the later Life states was next to the river Thames. Countless miracles subsequently took place at the site of her grave.

John Blair's research into the extent and context of minster foundation in the mid Saxon period, particularly in the Thames Valley, suggests that the Frideswide legend may preserve a garbled memory of genuine people, places and events (Blair 1988a; 1994, 52–4, 61–3). He has argued that the Upper Thames Valley saw the foundation of a whole series of minsters along the Thames and its tributaries during the later 7th and early 8th centuries, under the patronage of Mercian kings and sub-kings (1994, 56–69, fig. 41). The Frideswide legend's suggestion of a minster at Oxford, presided over by the saintly daughter of a Mercian sub-king and in existence by the early 8th century would fit well with what is more reliably known from elsewhere.

Although no structural evidence has yet been found for the Anglo-Saxon minster, the consensus of current opinion is that it is likely to have been located in the same place as the later Augustinian priory, on the site that is today occupied by Christ Church and Oxford Cathedral; that is, at the south-east edge of the Second Gravel Terrace, overlooking what would have been at the time a steep drop to the Thames channels below. Information from the second Life suggests that the church of St Mary, in which the saint was believed to have been buried,

would have lain under the north side of the present cathedral building. Blair has suggested (1988a, 233–5; 1994, 61–3) that the original dedication to the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary and All Saints mentioned by the Lives could imply the original existence of a line of three churches that may be perpetuated in the alignment of the north side of the present cathedral and the churches of St Aldate's and St Ebbe's to the west. No firm evidence has been found for the Anglo-Saxon minster precinct, although the steep natural slope of the ground and the river channels may have defined its south-east and east sides. Blair has suggested that the early ditch found in excavations to the west at Church Street (Gaz No. 24; see above) could have been the minster's western boundary (1988a, 235).

The most compelling archaeological evidence for the existence of a mid Saxon minster at the site comes from burials found in the vicinity, which suggest the presence of a large cemetery during the 10th century, but also probably earlier. Burials have been excavated in four locations at Christ Church since the 1960s. Graves found by Sturdy in 1963 beneath the north-east chapels of Oxford cathedral (Gaz No. 20) are probably of 12th-century date, but two burials recorded by Hassall in Tom Quad in 1972 (Gaz No. 22) provided the first suggestion of a possible mid-Saxon presence. The skeletons were found lying on beds of charcoal, and a sample of charcoal from the earlier grave was submitted for radiocarbon dating; the result was interpreted at the time as indicative of a date in the second quarter of the 9th century (Hassall 1973, 271), although subsequent recalibration has given a much wider date range of cal AD 680–1160 (HAR-190(S); Table A2.3). During excavations in Christ Church cloister in 1985 (Gaz No. 23), 14 inhumations were found cut into the red-brown loam topsoil. Radiocarbon dates were obtained on bone samples from four stratigraphically related burials (Table A2.3). Three of these were similar, and broadly of the later 8th to 10th century but the fourth was significantly earlier, dated to the range cal AD 660–890 (HAR-6820).

Most recently, excavations in 1998 immediately outside the south-east end of the cathedral (Gaz No. 120) recovered a further 37 burials, the earliest of which cut natural gravel. Bone samples from three stratigraphically early graves were submitted for high-precision radiocarbon measurement, and the results are shown in Table A2.3. The radiocarbon dates are consistent with the stratigraphic sequence, and the later two have broad date ranges between the 8th and 10th centuries. The third dated burial was the earliest, and gave a very surprising result, with a date range of cal AD 620–690 (skeleton 402; NZA-12343). This is the earliest radiocarbon determination yet obtained for Saxon Oxford, and certainly the first to suggest an unequivocal 7th-century date. The skeleton, of a woman aged 40+, came from the bottom of a sequence of graves in an area that was subsequently re-used quite intensively

for burials through the mid and late Saxon period. There is thus increasing evidence to suggest the presence of a substantial mid and late Saxon cemetery on the site of St Frideswide's Priory, which originated in the 7th century.

This is not in itself sufficient to confirm the existence of the minster at this date. It is clear from the evidence of isolated mid Saxon cemeteries such as Beacon Hill, Lewknor (Chambers 1976) and Yarnton (Boyle forthcoming) that people in the Oxford region, as elsewhere, were by no means necessarily (or even usually) buried in minster graveyards during the mid Saxon period, even if Christian burial rites must have been administered by minster priests. It remains possible that a cemetery could have existed at Oxford without the presence of a mid Saxon church, although the weight of later evidence for the minster suggests that this is perhaps unlikely. It is certainly worth noting that only 3 of the 37 burials excavated in 1998 were females, and the stratigraphic and pottery evidence suggests that most of the burials, if not all, were 11th-century or earlier (Boyle 2001). Such an imbalance is strongly suggestive of a cemetery belonging to the community of secular clerks that historical sources suggest succeeded the nuns at the site, at some point before the end of the 10th century (Blair 1994, 226–7).

There is the very slightest hint at Oxford for a possible cemetery shift in the 7th century, of the kind that has been observed in many instances nationally, and locally at Long Wittenham and Dorchester-on-Thames (Boyle *et al.* 1995, 143). The suggestion at Oxford derives from the report of an observation during building works at Pembroke College, probably in 1723, which refers to 'the great Numbers of human Skeletons..., some 16 Feet deep, many with their Feet inverted to the south' that were said to have been found during digging of the vault under Pembroke College chapel in 1732 (Peshall 1773, addenda p. 29). The observation that many of the skeletons were orientated north-south would be consistent with an early Saxon cemetery on the site, and it is very unfortunate indeed that no further information is available and that there is no record of any finds.

A number of other burials have been recovered on the west side of St Aldate's, in the vicinity of St Aldate's church. The church itself is first mentioned *c.* 1140, but is likely to be considerably older. Blair has suggested that it may originally have been one of three churches belonging to St Frideswide's minster (see above), but there is as yet no archaeological evidence to confirm this. The site was, however, used for burials in the late Saxon period, if not earlier. No dating evidence is available for two west-east aligned burials found a short distance to the south-west of the church outside Pembroke College gate (*Oxoniensia* 25 (1960), 134; reported as Beef Lane), but an 11th-century burial, apparently of some status, was found around 1890 'in St Aldate's Street, Oxford, when excavations were

being made for a drain opposite the great gateway of Christ Church' (*Proc. Soc. Antiq. London*, 2nd ser. xix (1901–3), 221). This burial was in a stone coffin, and the description suggests that it was located at the east edge of the churchyard, opposite Tom Tower. A gold finger ring of six plaited rods was found with the burial; rings of this type are generally associated with Viking contexts, and the fashion may have been introduced into southern England under Danish rule in the 11th century (Graham-Campbell 1988).

Most recently, rather earlier evidence has been recovered during archaeological monitoring in advance of reordering works in the church itself (Gaz No. 121). Nineteen burials were excavated towards the west end of the south aisle, of which eight, concentrated towards the bottom of the sequence, were 'charcoal burials', either laid upon or covered by substantial deposits of carbonised wood. A series of bone samples were taken from three stratigraphically related burials from this group, and submitted for high-precision radiocarbon dating. The results (Table A2.3) show that burial was taking place on the site in the 9th or 10th century. Unfortunately, no evidence was recovered to confirm whether the burials were associated with a contemporary church on the site. A fragment of a fine carved cross shaft, stylistically mid 10th-century in date, had been reused in the masonry of the south nave wall. Such a cross could suggest the presence of a church on the site at the time, although it could also derive from a free-standing cross in a graveyard. However, given that it was found in a secondary context, it is also unfortunately by no means certain that it was not imported for reuse from another site.

Mid Saxon Oxford: conclusions

The evidence discussed above represents a significant advance in knowledge since the time of Jope's review in 1956, but there are still very few certainties in the archaeology of mid Saxon Oxford. There has been a great deal of speculation about the historical background to the mid Saxon crossing at Oxford, and some writers have drawn attention to the development of military obligations in the 8th and 9th centuries (army service, bridge work and fortress work) to suggest that Oxford originated as a Mercian bridgehead fortress during the latter part of the reign of King Offa (757–796) (Durham 1977, 177–8; 1984a, 85–6; Haslam 1987). There is no doubt that at this time the Oxford area would have been under Mercian control, and it probably remained so during the reign of Offa's successor Coenwulf (796–821); indeed, there is evidence that Coenwulf may have had personal connections with Oxfordshire (Blair 1994, 55). By the middle of the 9th century it appears that the rulers of Wessex had established their authority over the area, but by a process of marriage alliance and negotiation rather than conquest (Blair 1994, 93); Oxford, on the north bank of the Thames,

probably remained under a Mercian lord, but one who was by now subject to the ultimate overlordship of the king of Wessex.

The archaeology of mid Saxon Oxford is Mercian in context, therefore, but the evidence is not currently sufficient to take the argument further on archaeological grounds, whatever may be inferred from topographical analysis and historical sources. The development of a fortified bridgehead at Oxford would fit well with what is known of Offa's policy, but there is at present no particularly convincing archaeological evidence that the building of the timber bridge and revetment works on the crossing line are datable to the period of his reign. It has been noted above that there is very little evidence for mid Saxon activity at Oxford beyond the area of the crossing, although it is accepted that this is not necessarily inconsistent with the view that there was a Mercian fortress here (Haslam 1987, 86–8). Nevertheless there is no particularly convincing evidence that the defences of Oxford are datable to the mid Saxon period, much less to the reign of Offa (see below).

The stone surface seen at the BT Tunnel suggests that the crossing at Oxford, and human activity nearby, existed before the later mid Saxon period, and arguably before the end of the 7th century. The 7th-century radiocarbon date from burial 402 at Christ Church lends considerable support to this view, and would be consistent with the development of St Frideswide's minster at the site before or during the 690s. Such a minster could well have been established under royal authority with a view to controlling and exploiting the Thames crossing, and the later appropriations of Thames minsters by Mercian kings demonstrate that any minster at Oxford could also have been repossessed and absorbed in a new royal initiative, such as a bridgehead fortress. This must at present remain speculation. The evidence for the Wessex *burh*, known to have existed from the early 10th century, is incontrovertible, however, and forms the subject of the next section of this discussion.

THE LATE SAXON TOWN (FIG. 2.4)

The earliest reference to Oxford in documentary sources comes in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry under the year 911–12, where it is recorded that Edward the Elder succeeded to London and Oxford and to all the lands that belonged to them (Plate 1.2). Oxford is also listed in the Burghal Hidage, the memorandum of the reign of Edward the Elder listing 33 *burhs*, places of varying kinds that had been supplied with fortifications in order to serve as defended centres against the Vikings for the surrounding countryside. The document is currently believed to date from the period 914–19, and has recently been the subject of a new edition and re-evaluation (Hill and Rumble 1996). The *burhs* were not all founded at the same time; some were the work

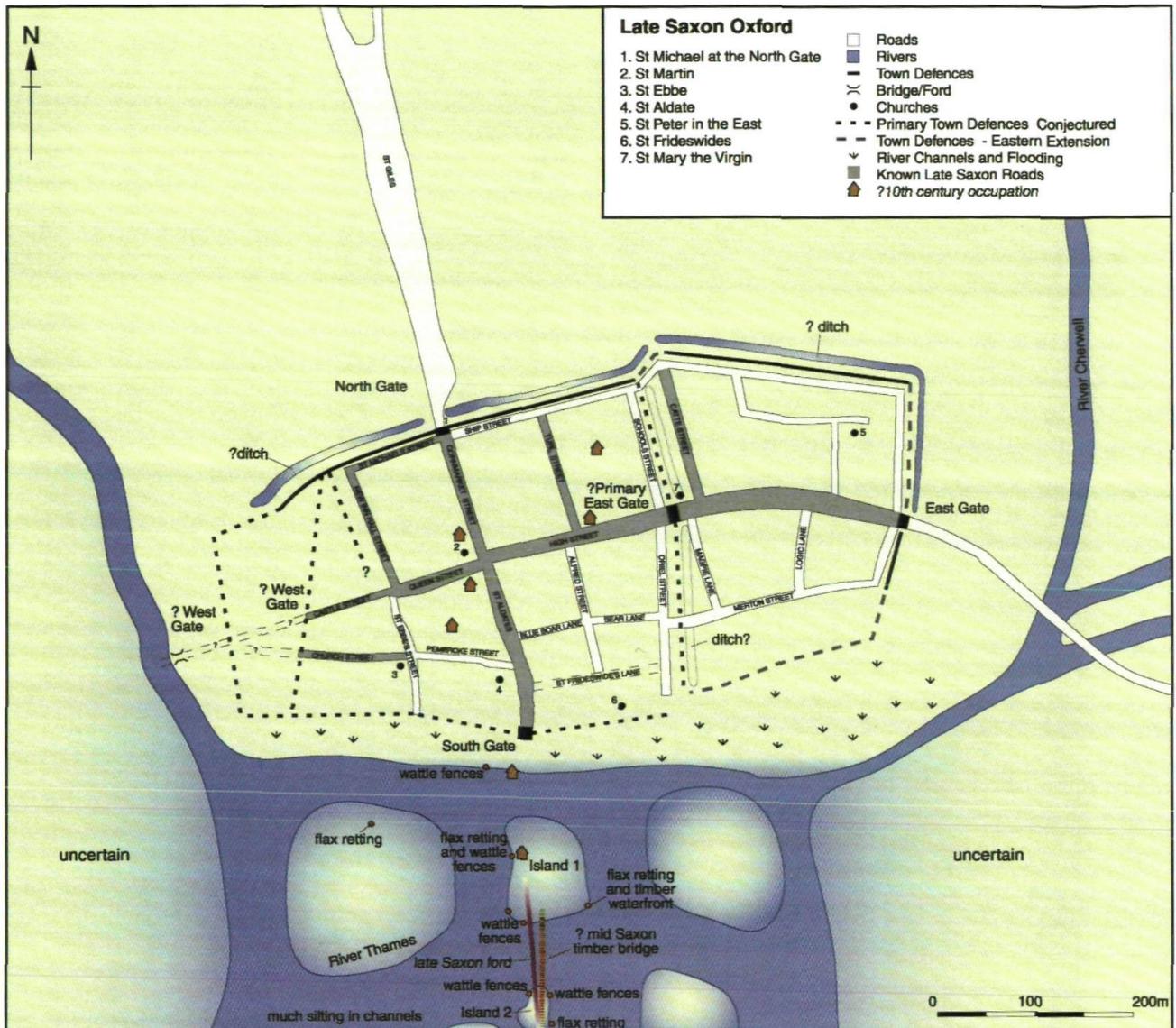


Figure 2.4 The 10th- to 11th-century burh.

of King Alfred in the late 9th century, others of his son and daughter Edward the Elder and Aethelflaed, and of his grandson Athelstan. They varied greatly. Some, including Oxford, rapidly established themselves and grew into thriving towns. Others, usually those on smaller and more restricted sites, never developed beyond their primary function as forts and were later abandoned and replaced by new defended commercial centres.

The idea that Oxford showed evidence of having been deliberately planned and laid out as a new town in the early 10th century was suggested by Salter (*CHSJ; Medieval Oxford*), although the idea proved very controversial, and won little support (Lobel 1938; Jope 1956a). It had long been well known that Oxford was a late Saxon burh, and that it was listed as such in the Burghal Hidage, but it was arguably not until the publication of Biddle

and Hill's 'Late Saxon Planned Towns' (1971) that the connection between burhs and town planning gained widespread currency. Biddle and Hill suggested that, as well as walls, a number of the larger places mentioned in the Burghal Hidage showed evidence of rectilinear planning of the burh interior, which appeared to have been divided into a gridiron pattern of streets. They argued that this represented a concern by the Wessex kings to create not merely fortresses, but fortified towns, in which the rectilinear street system divided the interior into areas for permanent habitation. The publication of this article coincided at Oxford with the major excavations at St Ebbe's, in the city centre, where early street surfaces were found that appeared to have formed part of just such a street grid (Hassall *et al.* 1989, 127). Since that time, much archaeological research at Oxford has been directed towards the discovery and dating of

possible elements of a defended town with an early rectilinear street grid, that may be attributable to a deliberate act of town planning around the turn of the 10th century. The evidence for the primary elements of such a system, defences, gates, streets and the form of the earliest occupation of the town, will be considered first in the review that follows here, with a brief survey of the evidence for the date of the *burh's* foundation. This will be followed by a review of the evidence for the Thames crossing in the late Saxon period, and then by the evidence for urban life in the rapidly growing town of the 10th and early 11th centuries: houses, churches, crafts, trade and everyday life, and the growth of suburbs.

The defences

The building of the earliest defences of Oxford is entirely undocumented. Unlike other *burhs* such as Winchester, Chichester, Exeter and Bath, Oxford had never been a Roman town, and there was therefore no option to repair and reinstate a Roman circuit. Jope commented (1956a, 243) that the Saxon boundary probably consisted of a ditch and an earthen rampart with a palisade along the top and timber gatehouses. No evidence of such a structure had been found when Jope was writing, but he followed Salter (*Lecture on the Walls of Oxford*, 1912) in suggesting that the line of the Saxon boundary was arguably followed by the later medieval stone town wall (Chapter 4, below).

Since Jope's time, a number of excavations (locations shown on Fig. 4.1) have revealed evidence for defences very much of the form that Jope foresaw (St Michael's churchyard, Gaz No. 29; Broad St, Exeter College, Gaz No. 41; New College, Gaz No. 70 and 24A St Michael's St, Gaz No 106). The best evidence was at 24A St Michael's Street and is reported in full in this volume (Chapter 4, below; a summary of the important results from New College can also be found in Chapter 4. For other possible sightings of the rampart, although less certain, see Gaz Nos 66 and 79). The results suggest that the *burh* was defended by a rampart constructed of earth with a turf facing, and strengthened by horizontal lacing timbers. Initially a timber revetment reinforced and protected the outer face of the rampart, but this was subsequently replaced by a stone facing. The rampart was at least 1.6 m high, and between 7.65 and 13 m wide, and was fronted by a ditch. The ditch has only been observed at one location (Gaz No. 29) where its inner edge was reported as lying 3.8 m north of the rampart. A conjectural reconstruction of the rampart is shown in Figure 4.10, below.

Despite this apparently very clear picture, there are significant outstanding problems associated with Oxford's late Saxon defences. There is as yet no conclusive proof that the rampart is late Saxon, and no good dating evidence has been recovered by any of the rampart excavations. The only pottery recovered from the rampart has been of Roman date, and only Roman pottery occurred in the

pre-rampart levels at St Michael's St. At St Michael's St and New College the rampart had been constructed over a ploughsoil that showed evidence of having lain fallow for a period of up to a decade; at St Michael's churchyard the rampart had been constructed on undisturbed natural soil, and was overlain by the graveyard fill. At both St Michael's St and St Michael's churchyard there was evidence that a stone revetting wall had been added to the front of the rampart, although the dating of this is similarly obscure.

St Michael's churchyard was the only site with archaeological evidence of events intervening between the facing of the rampart in stone and the construction of the 13th-century town wall. At some point after the facing of the rampart in stone but before the construction of the 13th-century town wall the rampart was levelled on this site, and a new stone wall was constructed some 12–13 m to the north, within the late Saxon ditch. Evidence for a construction trench for this wall implies that the ditch must have been at least partially filled by the time the wall was built, and a single potsherd of early Medieval Oxford Ware (Fabric AC) suggests that this did not happen before the mid 11th century. At the time of excavation it was considered that the wall had been built to retain spoil from the demolition of the rampart, which arguably completed the backfilling of the ditch at this site. A layer of ash and burnt clay overlay the backfill of the ditch and sealed the construction trench for the 'retaining' wall, as well as numerous graves. The layer of ash and burnt clay was subsequently cut by the construction trench for the 13th-century town wall, which was built on foundation arches (presumably because of the unstable ditch fills) immediately to the north of the 'retaining' wall. Only small quantities of pottery were recovered from the ditch fill and the town wall construction trench; all was of 12th-century date. The interpretation of this sequence of events has proved difficult and controversial, not least because of the architecture of the church tower itself (Plate 2.2), which is of 11th-century construction and arguably Oxford's earliest surviving building (for a full discussion, see Chapter 4, below; problems associated with the architecture of the tower are also discussed in Blair 1994, 163–7). Despite the plethora of possibilities there is unfortunately no firm archaeological evidence to prove at what point the rampart was levelled here, although it may have been associated with rebuilding or extension of the church and its churchyard, arguably in the later 11th or 12th century; a date contemporary with the building of the church tower is by no means an impossibility. The tower is thought on architectural grounds to have been built sometime between 1010 and 1060 (Blair, Chapter 4 below), but the remainder of the church is of 13th-century and later build. It remains a matter of conjecture how the late Saxon and Norman church could have fitted into this space, and how the defensive circuit might have been modified in the 11th or 12th centuries to



Plate 2.2 *St Michael at the Northgate, from the south-west. Photo Mike Hallam.*

compensate for the demolition of the rampart and the extension of the churchyard. Readers who wish to pursue this argument will find further information in Chapter 4, and in earlier publications (especially Durham *et al.* 1983; Hassall 1986, esp. fig. 13; Blair 1994, 163–7, Parsons 1994).

The generally accepted dating of the rampart to the turn of the 10th century is therefore only an assumption, which is based on the argument that the town must have had fortifications at the time of the Burghal Hidage and that there is no strong evidence that Oxford was ever fortified before that time. The form of the rampart and the timber facing is paralleled at other *burhs* (see Chapter 4 below for a discussion of the evidence), as is the subsequent stone facing. The dating of the rampart observed at New College is particularly problematic. The excavated evidence suggested a sequence and type of construction very similar to that observed at St

Michael's St and St Michael's churchyard. The only significant difference noted at New College was that here the rampart did not appear to have been faced with stone. However, there is a generally accepted view (based on topography and the evidence of the Burghal Hidage) that the eastern part of the late Saxon town was a later addition, and may not have been enclosed until the early 11th century. The evidence for this is discussed below, by Julian Munby. The proposed dating of the extension to the early 11th century, which has achieved widespread currency, appears to be based on the view that the enclosure of an eastern suburb might have been a response to the threat of renewed Danish attacks in the early 11th century (Hassall 1975, 33; 1986, 122). If this is true, the New College rampart would have been constructed around a century later than the rampart seen at St Michael's St and St Michael's churchyard. The only archaeological

evidence in support of this is the apparent lack of a stone facing; this could imply that the rampart around the eastern extension had either not been built at the point when the earlier defences were refaced, or possibly that it may have been in better condition because it was new, or only fairly recently constructed. However, this is a far from convincing argument, and the similarity of the 'primary' and 'extension' ramparts remains a significant difficulty in the understanding of Oxford's early defences.

The line of the earliest circuit is still not fully understood. Wherever the rampart has been observed it has been on, or close to, the line of the later medieval stone wall; however, it is not invariably found, and there have been observations of the wall where there was no evidence for the rampart. The rampart has only been certainly identified on the north and east of the town, at the sites discussed above. Two observations reported from the south circuit are much less certain. The first of these was a sighting of a possible late Saxon bank of red loam and topsoil 3 ft thick on the line of the 13th-century wall at Merton College, reported by Sturdy in a note in 1963 (Gaz No. 66). Subsequently, observations of test pits immediately behind the town wall in Pembroke College (Gaz No. 79) identified redeposited red loam topsoil at least 1.2 m deep above the original topsoil, immediately north of the town wall footings. This was also tentatively identified as the earth rampart (CBA Group 9 Newsletter 4, 1974, 23; Hassall *et al.* 1989, 269, 272). Excavations slightly to the west of Pembroke College on the site of the medieval Littlegate (Gaz No. 61) showed that the 13th-century town wall here had been built over an area used for domestic occupation, and no trace of any earlier defences was seen. It has been suggested (Hassall *et al.* 1989, 272 and fig. 80) that the river channels and marshy ground may have provided sufficient protection in this area, and that no defensive rampart need ever have been constructed.

In the south-east of the town, the line of the medieval town wall itself is uncertain for the stretch running westwards from Bastion 21 to St Aldate's (shown as Primary Town Defences Conjectured on Fig. 2.4), and no sign of an earth rampart has been detected in the area. The study of Bastion 21 reported in the present volume produced little useful new evidence (Chapter 4, below). A very small excavation in the quadrangle of Corpus Christi College in 1972 (Gaz No. 36) identified a large gully or ditch running NE-SW; the ditch was in excess of 4 m deep and was filled with unstable black mud. It has been suggested that this could represent part of the 10th-century defences (Hassall 1973, 274; Hassall *et al.* 1989, 119). No further evidence of a ditch on this alignment has been seen, but it is interesting to note that the projected line of a ditch outside the proposed primary defences would cross this area (Fig. 2.4).

The line of the defences on the west side of the late Saxon town is similarly obscure, and no evidence of the rampart has been seen here.

The problems in this area are undoubtedly due to the construction of Oxford Castle in 1071 (see below), and the generally accepted view is that the western defences of the late Saxon town probably ran along the line of the eastern defences of the castle, and that the digging of the castle moat would have incorporated the *burh* ditch (Hassall *et al.* 1989, 269, fig. 80). The only evidence to date for a possible element of the late Saxon defences was recovered in 1977-8 at No. 40 George St (Gaz No. 47), where three small trenches immediately north of the town wall, and immediately east of the castle defences in Bulwarks Lane, found evidence of a very large ditch, aligned north-south, and in excess of 12 m wide. The ditch was filled with gravelly loam containing late 12th- or early 13th-century pottery, suggesting that it had been backfilled not long before the 13th-century town wall was constructed over the top. The ditch could have formed part of the late Saxon defences, although it could equally have been of 12th-century date (Durham *et al.* 1983, 35). Two small trenches in the basement of No. 4 Bulwarks Lane, roughly 100 m to the south-east, failed to locate any continuation of this ditch; instead clear, if limited, evidence was found that the area had been occupied during the 10th to 12th centuries (Gaz No. 11). The line of the defences must therefore have lain to the west, but how far to the west remains a distinct problem. As Hassall pointed out (VCH iv, 301), a rampart running just to the west of New Inn Hall St and St Ebbe's St would have taken advantage of a steep natural fall in ground level at this point (from 65 m OD at New Inn Hall St to 60 m OD at the west edge of the castle mound). Topographically this hypothesis is most attractive; it would imply that the planners of the *burh* had fortified the crest of the Second Gravel Terrace, and it would allow for a symmetrical street plan either side of the north-south axis of Cornmarket and St Aldate's. Unfortunately, however, the extensive investigations in St Ebbe's ten years earlier had failed to locate any evidence for the late Saxon western defences on this line; on the contrary, the results suggested that the first metalled streets extended further west. The critical observation (Gaz No. 26; section W F73) was located at the west end of Church St, which lies on the edge of the gravel terraces, below the 60 m contour line.

The need to reconcile the George St ditch with the Church St section no doubt explains the rather oblique angle of the hypothetical western defensive line illustrated by Hassall (*et al.* 1989, fig. 80). This model has not been significantly amended since it was first published, and has generally been followed by more recent writers (Blair 1994, fig. 86; Hill and Rumble 1996, fig. IV.21). It remains possible, however, that the western defences of the late Saxon town were indeed further to the west, possibly even extending to the river, and thus enclosing late Saxon occupation found under the castle mound (Gaz No. 74; see also this chapter, below). The different possibilities have been illustrated in Figure 2.4.

The eastern extension by Julian Munby

The eastern part of the late Saxon town was not shown on Hassall's hypothetical reconstruction because it has long been thought that the original defended area stopped west of Catte St/Magpie Lane, and that the area to the east was a later extension. This hypothesis is derived from a combination of topographical analysis, the parallels with the plans of nearby boroughs at Wallingford and Cricklade, and the evidence of the Burghal Hidage. The topographical argument (Hassall 1975) relies on the shape of the late medieval defended circuit, which has a marked change in character at this point. On the north side of the town, the wall swings out to reach the Smith Gate at the north end of Catte Street, and on the south there is the re-entrant at the site of Bastion 21, at the east end of St Frideswide's church. If the original eastern limit was here, then this goes some way to explaining the near parallel streets (Schools Street/Catte Street; Oriel Street/Magpie Lane), which have elsewhere been found to enclose earlier defensive lines, as at Hereford (Shoesmith 1974). The archaeological evidence to support this hypothesis at Oxford is however somewhat slight, and relies on the 1899 excavations in the Clarendon Quadrangle (Gaz No. 9; Chapter 4, below), which found an early wall turning south-east from the line of the later medieval town wall. No continuation of this wall was found in the excavation of the Bodleian Library underground bookstore in Radcliffe Square in 1909 (Gaz No. 89; Salter *Medieval Oxford*, 11). Place-name evidence from the former name of Oriel Street (Shidyerd Street: OE *scid-geard* apparently referring to a palisade) is suggestive, but no more (*P N Oxon*, 41).

The other argument for the eastern extension relies on the evidence of the Burghal Hidage, which suggests that the defended circuit at the time the document was compiled was considerably smaller than the full later medieval circuit. According to a complex algorithm in the text it is explained that an acre's breadth (a chain of 22 yards) can be defended by 16 men (that is, four men to each pole of $5\frac{1}{2}$ yards), at a rate of 1 man per hide. Oxford's full medieval circuit of stone walls is about 9650 ft, which would accordingly require some 2339 hides to defend it. Unfortunately, Oxford occurs in the list at a point between Cricklade and Wallingford where the text is corrupt, giving alternative readings of 1300 or 1500 hides (or even 2400 hides in the least reliable version). In his first edition, Hill (1969, 90) suggested on textual grounds that 1400 hides was perhaps the most likely reading, but the more recent edition takes the view that 1500 hides is more likely (1996, 74-86, n.11, tables 4.2, 4.4). The figures can best be shown on a table, relating them to the actual circuits of the medieval defences, and the smaller pre-Conquest circuit (Table 2.1).

If Oxford was first laid out on a smaller plan (assuming an eastern defence on the line of Schools

Table 2.1 Length of Oxford defences calculated from variant Burghal Hidage texts, in relation to the medieval walls and options for a smaller Saxon circuit

Hides	Length (feet)	Length (yards)	Length (metres)
<i>Defences in the Burghal Hidage</i>			
1300	5362 $\frac{1}{2}$	1787 $\frac{1}{2}$	1634
1400	5775	1925	1760
1500	6187 $\frac{1}{2}$	2062 $\frac{1}{2}$	1886
2400	9900	3300	3018
<i>Existing or supposed defensive lines</i>			
Medieval circuit	8350	2783	2545
Small town (small)	5475	1825	1669
Small town (Hill)	6039	2013	1840
Small town (large)	6775	2258	2065

Street and Oriel Street), the defended line could have been between 5475 ft and 6775 ft, depending on the uncertain course taken on the west and south, and the variety of options that have been suggested. Most of these options, including Hill's suggested 6039 ft (1996, 212) fall within the limits suggested by the Burghal Hidage.

Two recent studies of aspects of landholding in the medieval town have provided further indications of differences between the two halves of the early town. In plotting the urban properties of Abingdon Abbey, it was found quite unexpectedly that they all occur within the western half of the town, none having been identified east of the line of Schools and Oriel Streets (Bond 1979; Lambrick and Slade 1991, fig. 6). Another suggestive distribution has been found in the attempt to identify the sites of 'mural mansions' (*murales mansiones*), uniquely occurring in the Oxford entry in Domesday Book, where they are listed and described as being free from customary dues except expedition and wall repair when required by the king (DB i. 154a; B5 and 9; Ballard 1904, 32). Only a few of these 'mural mansions' have certainly been located in Oxford (Salter 1933), but a partial identification has now been derived from a royal writ of 1227 listing defaulters. By mapping properties known to have belonged to individuals mentioned in the writ, a distribution of possible 'mural mansions' is obtained, hardly definitive, but perhaps more reliable where only a single property is so identified. From this it is suggested that a significant majority of possible 'mural mansions' occur within the eastern half of Oxford, possibly implying an imposition on landowners within the extended area of the borough (Turner 1990, fig. 1). If true, and the distribution is impressive, this would detract from the old argument that 'mural mansions' were necessarily part of the original arrangements for defending the *burh*, where urban properties associated with rural manors reflected the scheme of the Burghal Hidage, and would rather be seen as a

later pre-Conquest rearrangement (Ballard 1904). It is only Oxford that has 'mural mansions' described as such in Domesday, and it is not impossible that they arose from the very circumstances we are considering here (Stephenson 1933, 102). However, the evidence for rural manors holding properties in boroughs is very general in Domesday, whether they occur in the borough entry or in the main body of the text (Ballard 1904; Darby 1977). Apart from these topographical suggestions, there is little in the known shape or disposition of tenements to suggest any marked difference in the character of the 'new' town from the 'old'.

The proposed eastern extension remains really quite difficult to reconcile with the archaeological evidence. The similarity between the excavated stretches of rampart in the north and east of the town is very striking, and a further problem arises from the evidence of the earliest street surfaces, which is reviewed below. In summary, primary street surfaces that are likely to date from the early years of the *burh* have been recorded throughout the town centre. These observations suggest that the primary metalling of the High Street extended past the proposed line of the first eastern defences and continued for at least another 100 m eastwards.

Gates

Oxford was laid out around principal north-south and east-west axes that intersected at the central crossroads later known as Carfax. The north-south axis (represented by the later Cornmarket and St Aldate's) is likely to have preserved the traditional route of the Thames crossing. The earlier status of the east-west axis (represented by the High Street and Queen St) is less clear, but there was certainly a crossing of the Cherwell at the site of the later Magdalen Bridge by at least 1004 (VCH iv, 4, n.10). A crossing of the Thames may also have existed on the west, on the site of the later Castle Mill and Quaking bridges (Hassall *et al.* 1989, 272). It is therefore a reasonable assumption that the late Saxon *burh* would have needed at least four gates, at the north, south, east and west of the town, although there is at present very little archaeological evidence for their form and location.

The most certain is the Northgate. Here the position of the late Saxon gate is marked by the standing tower of the gate church, St Michael's. The form of the late Saxon gate is unknown, although there is some evidence that there may have been a second tower on the west side of the road (see Munby, The topography of the Northgate, Chapter 4, below). The later medieval gate occupied this location until it was finally demolished by the Paving Commissioners in 1772. The late Saxon Southgate is generally assumed to have stood on the site of its later medieval successor, which was located in St Aldate's adjacent to the south-west tower of Christ Church; the gate was partially demolished during the construction of Christ Church in the early 16th century, and the

remainder fell down in 1617 (VCH iv, 303). It has been suggested that the name Aldate may be a corruption of 'old gate', and that St Aldate's church may have been the original gate church (VCH iv, 8; *PN Oxon*, i, 43). However, a similar dedication to St Aldate in Gloucester, at a church not particularly close to a gate, inclines John Blair to the view that Aldate is more probably a corruption of a genuine saint's name, possibly Welsh Illtud or Old English Ealdheard (pers. comm.). By the early 12th century there was a church (or chapel) of St Michael at the Southgate, which was confirmed to St Frideswide's Priory in 1122. St Michael at the Southgate was closed and demolished by Cardinal Wolsey in 1525 and has never been satisfactorily located, but is thought to have stood just inside the wall on the east side of the street (see Chapter 4, below).

The position of the late Saxon Eastgate is complicated by the question of the eastern extension (see above). If it is accepted that the eastern defences of the primary *burh* lay just west of Catte St and Magpie Lane, then the first Eastgate must have been near the site now occupied by the church of St Mary the Virgin, which may thus have served as a gate church. No archaeological excavations have been carried out on this site, but the church is mentioned in Domesday Book, which records that it belonged (with two houses in the town) to the estate of Aubrey, Earl of Northumbria. Whether the *burh* was extended or not, the Eastgate of the town by the middle of the 11th century is assumed to have been on the site of the later medieval Eastgate, just to the east of the junction of the High Street and Merton St. There is no archaeological evidence for the Eastgate, but a chapel of the Holy Trinity at the Eastgate was confirmed to St Frideswide's Priory in 1122, and was apparently built over the gate (VCH iv, 302). The Eastgate was demolished by the Paving Commissioners in 1771.

The uncertainties regarding the line of the western defences of the *burh* have been referred to above, and the position of the late Saxon Westgate remains a matter of conjecture. The later medieval Westgate is shown on Agas' map of 1578 (Fig. 4.2) standing immediately south of the castle moat, just west of the junction of Church St and Castle St, giving onto a lane leading to the Castle Mill bridge over the mill stream channel. The gate was demolished in the early 17th century. This is considered unlikely to have been the site of the original late Saxon Westgate, and is possibly not even the position of the first Norman Westgate, which may have been moved following the building of the castle barbican in 1215/16; topographically both the castle moat and the barbican seem to have constrained the position of the later medieval Westgate quite severely (see Hassall *et al.* 1989, 274, fig. 83). The other gates of the town were located on the principal axes rather than on secondary streets, and it may be assumed that the same would have been true of the original Westgate. An original Westgate on Queen St/Castle St would be consistent with this pattern, and the church of St Peter le Bailey,

near the junction of New Inn Hall St and Castle St has been suggested as a possible gate church, assuming that the defensive line ran west of New Inn Hall St and St Ebbe's St (Hassall 1986, 122). St Peter le Bailey was confirmed to St Frideswide's Priory in 1122, but its earlier history is unknown. However, it remains possible that the defences on this side of the *burh* were originally further west, and it has been suggested that the tower of the former collegiate church of St George's in the Castle may have been associated with an original Westgate here (Renn 1994, esp 179–81 and fig. 2).

There is no known evidence for any minor gates in the late Saxon defences, although arguably the eastwards extension of the town could have created a need for gates at the north and south re-entrant angles of the defences, at the later Smithgate at the north of Catte St, and at the site of Bastion 21, at the south end of Oriel St. The chapel of St Mary at Smithgate was mentioned in 1366, when it was described as 'the little tower of Smith Gate with the statue of the Virgin on it' (VCH iv, 406), but on the south side St Frideswide's Priory had a gate in the wall before 1136 × 40 (CSF, i, No. 12; see Blair 1988a, 236–7 and this volume, Chapter 4, below). These gates may have been older, although this can only be speculation on present evidence. There was apparently not a late Saxon gate at the Littlegate, at the south end of St Ebbe's St, where excavations located quarrying and domestic occupation underlying the 13th-century wall (Hassall *et al.* 1989, 130–40).

The street grid

Evidence for the presence and absence of early street surfaces has been recorded in 57 observations

throughout the city centre, which are summarised in Chapter 5 of this volume, below. The observations show that a number of Oxford's streets were metalled at a very early stage, which may suggest that they were laid out simultaneously as part of a planned development; conversely, some streets seem to have been later additions. In summary, there is good evidence for early metalling along the principal east-west axis of the High Street and Queen Street, and some evidence in St Aldate's. Evidence for the metalling of an early intramural street was seen behind the rampart at 24A St Michael's St. Elsewhere, observations suggest that a number of minor streets formed part of the original grid, but no early surfaces are known in the south-east of the town, where there have been very few opportunities for excavation.

The most impressive sequences were seen during the St Ebbe's excavations in 1970, in Castle St (section W F54) and in Church St (section W50) (Gaz Nos 14 and 25). Section W F54 (Fig. 2.5; Plate 2.3) was located west of New Inn Hall St, and this stretch of Castle St must have formed part of the main east-west axis of the town before the Norman Conquest and the building of the castle. The published drawing shows a north-south section across the street, with an impressive build-up of 18 street surfaces and the accumulations on top of them. The original topsoil here was seen to be very thin, and the earliest street surface had been compressed into it. It was uneven and consisted of fragments of irregular limestone cobbles, small stones and coarse gravel, heavily compacted. The overlying surfaces were generally of gravel without stones, and inferior in construction. Exclusively late Saxon pottery was found throughout the sequence up to the last surface but one; although some of this could have been redeposited in later resurfacings, the excavator's view was that

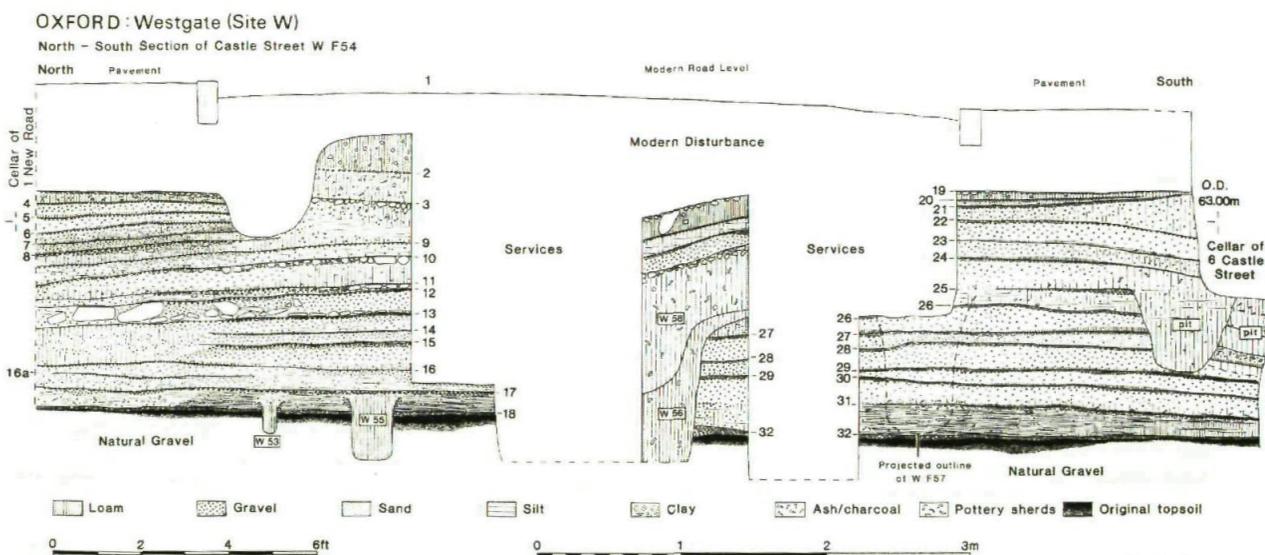


Figure 2.5 Early street surfaces in Castle Street, Oxford (first published in T Hassall *et al.* 'Excavations in St Ebbe's, Oxford, 1967–76', *Oxoniensia* 54 (1989), fig. 20).



Plate 2.3 Early street surfaces in section in Castle Street, looking east.

the sequence did appear to have built up over a very short space of time (Hassall *et al.* 1989, 128).

The earliest street surface was of considerably better quality than later resurfacings, with a very distinctive appearance. This was also observed in the Church St section (W50; Plate 2.4), where a primary surface of flat, angular cobbles and compacted gravel had also been laid directly onto a thin layer of original topsoil over the natural gravel, while overlying surfaces were generally of packed gravel or gravel and earth. There were fewer resurfacings apparent in Church St, perhaps reflecting its secondary status; the earliest surface had seen heavy use, however, and was shattered and compressed towards the centre. As at Castle St, the later medieval and post-medieval road surfaces had been extensively truncated, and most of the sequence at Church St was of late Saxon date, with a number of surfaces and features datable from 11th- or 12th-century pottery.

The distinctive appearance of the earliest street surface has meant that it has been possible to identify it in smaller exposures elsewhere in the town, and all observations are listed in Table 5.2 and considered in more detail in Chapter 5 of this volume, below. Particularly good evidence was recovered during excavations at the east end of Queen St (No. 4 and Nos 7-8, reported in this volume, Chapter 5 below) and during drainage work

along the High Street, which suggests that the primary surface extended along the entire length of the east-west axis of the *burh*. The street surfaces at the east end of Queen St clearly extended up to 8 m south of the modern street frontage. While it is possible that they could have been yard surfaces rather than streets, it is also possible that a large open space was created here in the centre of the *burh*, perhaps as an assembly point in times of trouble, or for meetings or marketing in times of peace. It may



Plate 2.4 Church Street, a primary late Saxon street surface.

be significant that the centre of town government was located in this area from the 12th century onwards (see Munby, Historical Background to four sites on Queen St, Chapter 5, below). However, the surfaces at No. 4 and Nos 7–8 were built-over well before the Norman Conquest, perhaps suggesting that private or commercial interests were superseding the older arrangements. Evidence for occupation layers contemporary with the street surfaces in the 10th century suggests that the process of encroachment could have begun quite early. In the early 11th century wells and probable cellar pits were dug through the gravel and pebble surfaces, pushing the street line further north. Excavations at the west end of Queen St (Gaz No. 86) revealed no evidence for early street surfaces, although early layers had clearly been removed here by extensive later truncation, and only limited investigations were possible along the street frontage (Sturdy and Munby 1985, 80). The presence of an early to mid 11th-century cellar pit at this site extending 2–3 m north of the modern street line was taken to imply that the original frontage of Queen St was originally further north. However, from the analogy of Nos 4 and 7–8 Queen St, it is at least arguable that the cellar pit represents further evidence of encroachment in the early to mid 11th century.

It is a reasonable assumption that the north-south axis would have been similarly metalled, although there have been no sightings of the primary surface in Cornmarket and only one good modern observation in St Aldate's. Evidence from excavations in Cornmarket (Gaz Nos 31, 33, 34 and 35, see also below) suggested that the late Saxon street frontage on the west of the street was at least 3 m forward of its modern line, and therefore well out of range of the archaeological observations. The frontage was subsequently brought back by over 4 m, and evidence from the Clarendon Hotel site (Gaz No. 33), where a stone vaulted cellar was found, suggested that this had happened by the time the building was constructed, arguably in the early to mid 12th century (Jope and Pantin 1958, 5). Sturdy (Gaz No. 31) found that a wide band of land along the modern east frontage of Cornmarket had not been dug through in the late Saxon period; this suggested that it could have been within the street during this period and supported the view that Cornmarket was originally further east than in the later medieval period, or today. In St Aldate's, the primary surface was only certainly observed at No. 7 (Gaz No. 90), although the 19th-century antiquary Herbert Hurst made a detailed report of a surface that seems likely to have been primary metalling, which he observed a short distance south of Carfax during drainage works in 1894.

A primary surface of small rounded pebbles on natural gravel, overlain by a second surface of cobbles, was seen in the excavations at 24A St Michael's St, providing the only evidence to date for a metalled intramural street (see Chapter 4, below).

The distinctive primary metalling has also been observed in two minor streets in the north of the town, suggesting that they were part of an original gridiron plan: two observations have been made in New Inn Hall St, and the surface was repeatedly observed along the length of a sewer trench at the south end of Turl St. Elsewhere, a number of later additions have also been identified (shown on Fig. 2.9). Excavations in the south-east corner of the walled town suggested that Logic Lane and the medieval lane of Kybald St (now closed up) were datable to around 1130 (Gaz No. 63); an early 12th-century date was suggested by Sturdy for the medieval St Frideswide's Lane (now closed up) immediately north of the priory precinct (Gaz No. 19); and the absence of primary metalling over the original ground surface in two observations in Brasenose Lane (Gaz Nos 3 and 4) suggests that this too was a later addition to the town.

The best dating evidence for the primary street surface was recovered in New Inn Hall St (Gaz No. 72; Plate 5.8), where a coin of Edward the Elder was found pressed onto the surface of one of the cobbles (see Chapter 6 for a full report on the coin). The coin is datable to the period *c.* 920. Pottery recovered from the earliest street surface in the Castle St section was of the late 8th- to 10th-century Late Saxon Oxford Ware (Fabric B); the pottery associated with the third to fifth surfaces was mixed Late Saxon Oxford Ware and St Neot's Ware, suggesting a date in the second half of the 10th century and early 11th century (Mellor 1989, 198). At 7–8 Queen St the main dating evidence for the early surfaces also comprised small quantities of Late Saxon Oxford Ware. The evidence for the dating of the primary street surface is thus slight, but consistent. It suggests that a network of metalled streets had been laid down sometime before the end of the reign of Edward the Elder, and that in places they had worn out and been resurfaced with inferior materials at least four times by the later 10th or early 11th century.

The primary street surface observed in Catte St remains problematic. The evidence for the proposed eastern extension of the *burh* has been discussed above, and according to this theory, Catte St would have lain outside the primary defences. There is no doubt about the observation here, and the original records in archive state that there was certainly a metalled surface of small round pebbles on top of the heavily compacted old ground surface. Evidence was also seen for a subsequent resurfacing; the St Neot's type pottery recorded from the resurfacing levels is reminiscent of Castle St, where resurfacings of the second half of the 10th or early 11th century were observed. Similar problems are posed by the observations of the primary street surface recorded in the High St, east of the church of St Mary the Virgin, during monitoring of drainage works (see Chapter 5, below). Observations A to F (Fig. 5.25) might be assumed to lie outside the proposed original defences of the *burh*, but the primary street surface was present here as it had been to the west,

and is described as primary pebble metalling on natural gravel. A single sherd of St Neot's ware lay over the primary metalling at observation C. The primary street surface was also seen 100 m further east in an observation opposite No. 33 High St (Gaz No. 55).

A number of possible explanations for this can be suggested, but on present evidence none can be regarded as more than a hypothesis to be tested by future research. It may be that important routes outside the primary *burh* were metalled at the same time as the internal streets, although it is hard to see what advantage there would have been in a metalled roadway running around the outside of a defensive ditch and rampart. The suggestion of 10th-century occupation from an evaluation at Queen's College (Gaz No. 119), and Sturdy's report of early domestic occupation and a 10th-century church beneath the church of St Peter in the East (Gaz No. 124), might even suggest that a metalled High Street served a (?possibly pre-existing) extramural settlement.

Alternatively the 'extramural' surfacing could have been later than the primary street surface, although of similar construction, and was perhaps not laid down until the proposed extension of the *burh* in the early 11th century. It is difficult to support this from the evidence of the Castle St section, where the 10th- and 11th-century resurfacings were clearly of inferior quality, using gravel rather than stones. If the streets of an extended *burh* had been surfaced at this point, it is not clear why superior materials were used for the extension, while the centre of the town was resurfaced with gravel. The third possibility is that the first street surface was not primary at all, but that the entire street surfacing was a feature of the early 11th century. It would, however, be difficult to account for a coin of c 920 becoming embedded in a street surface laid down a century later, and the pottery evidence from Castle St and Queen St, although limited, is not consistent with an 11th-century date for the earliest surfaces.

It is even possible to suggest that the *burh* of Oxford was first laid out on the smaller plan that is preserved in the alignment of the central streets during the reign of Alfred (see below), or even under a Mercian king, but that it was extended and provided with metalled streets before the end of the reign of Edward the Elder. This, however, would need to be reconciled with the evidence from the Clarendon Quadrangle excavations (Gaz No. 9; see also Chapter 4, below), which found a wall returning southwards from the northern defences, on the presumed alignment of the east edge of the primary *burh*. The wall appeared to be a facing for an earth bank, and Julian Munby suggests this could be interpreted as the original eastern defences of the primary *burh*, comprising a continuation of the rampart with a stone facing, as later observed at St Michael at the Northgate (Gaz No. 29). It may be unprovable archaeologically whether a primary eastern rampart of Alfred's time or earlier could

have been faced with stone and then demolished and abandoned for a major extension before the end of the reign of Edward the Elder. However, targeted excavation is probably the only means by which this dilemma will ever be resolved.

The burh interior: the form of the earliest occupation

The *burh* of Oxford was established on land taken out of the royal manor of Headington, and references in Domesday Book and later sources identify this as the king's eight yardlands (*terra de Ehtearð*), which continued to owe landgable in the 12th century (VCH iv, 5–7). Eight yardlands from the royal manor of Benson were allocated for the establishment of the neighbouring *burh* at Wallingford. The king's land at Oxford was later distinguished from the *ara* of St Frideswide, or the land of St Frideswide's altar, comprising scattered tenements in the south-east of the town around the site of the priory, which later lay within the parishes of St Frideswide, St Edward and St John the Baptist (*ibid.*). The meaning of the *ara* is still unclear, but it is possible that it preserves a memory of the establishment of the *burh* around a pre-existing minster precinct (itself arguably founded on land granted from the same royal estate, some two hundred years previously).

The new *burh* (or at least its central area) was divided into quarters by the four principal axial streets, Cornmarket, St Aldate's, the High Street and Queen St, and these quarters were further subdivided by minor streets. Evidence for the primary metalling of Turl St and New Inn Hall St suggests that the north-east and north-west quarters were each divided into at least two blocks, although there is at present no firm evidence that these large blocks were originally subdivided by further minor streets. In the south-east, St Frideswide's occupied the south part of the south-eastern block, although evidence for the northwards extension of the priory precinct in the 12th century (Gaz No. 19) suggests that the original precinct did not extend as far north as the medieval St Frideswide's Lane (later closed), which lay roughly opposite the south side of St Aldate's church. On purely topographical grounds it might be suggested that two more large blocks lay north of the precinct, defined by Alfred St (formerly St Edward's Lane) and Oriel St. No archaeological evidence is known, however, for the dates of these streets. On the west side of St Aldate's, it is now known that the area of St Aldate's church was in use for burials by the 10th century, if not earlier, although there is no evidence yet for a late Saxon church on the site. An observation of possible early street metalling near the junction of Beef Lane and St Ebbe's St (Gaz No. 80) suggests that there may have been plot divisions in this area, but the evidence is currently very slight. West of St Ebbe's St, Church St had a primary metalled surface, suggesting that a block of land existed here that was defined by Castle St to the north, St Ebbe's St to the east, and Church St to

the south, which may have extended westwards as far as the west defences or an associated intramural street. Hassall suggested (Hassall *et al.* 1989, 272) that another block, containing St Ebbe's Church, would have lain to the south. Although no independent dating evidence is known for Pembroke St, the fact that it continues the line of the primary Church St eastwards to St Aldate's suggests that it was probably also part of the original network. Pits of late 10th- or 11th-century date have been found on the street frontage (Gaz No. 85).

It has been suggested on the basis of early evidence at Winchester, that large tenements were apportioned to important landowners from the foundation of the *burh*, and perhaps comprised a principal dwelling and possibly a private church (Biddle and Keene 1976, 452–4). Links between urban properties and rural manors are clearly visible at Winchester in Domesday Book (*ibid.* 384–5, table 28 and fig. 20), although the system seems to have been breaking down by the end of the 11th century. Biddle and Keene suggest that such links may initially have been the means by which the inhabitants of the county were guaranteed accommodation within the defences of Winchester in times of trouble (*ibid.* 383). With the probable exception of St Frideswide's minster, no primary landholder can be identified at Oxford, although 11th-century evidence suggests the presence of a number of 'urban manors' that may represent the later development of this system. Blair (1994, 151) and Hassall *et al.* (1989, 272) have drawn attention to Ealdorman Aethelmaer's grant of *c.* 1005 to his foundation of Eynsham Abbey, in which he donated 'his *curia* in Oxford in which St Ebbe's Church was situated, with certain other rents pertaining to that court' (*CE*, p. viii, 36). Blair points out that this can be identified with the abbot of Eynsham's church and 13 houses mentioned by Domesday Book, and suggests the presence of an 'urban manor' in the area around St Ebbe's Church in the early 11th century. A slightly later grant relates to the area around St Martin's Church at Carfax (Blair 1994, 151, fig. 91). Here, a charter of Cnut of 1032 gives the estate of Lyford (Berks) to Abingdon Abbey, together with 'a certain little minster consecrated in honour of St Martin the Bishop, with the adjoining little estate (*praediolum*), in the town called by the famous name of Oxford'. An additional note states that Aethelwine bequeathed this estate to Abingdon with 'the tenement in Oxford where he himself dwelt', '*pone hagan on Oxnaforda pe he sylf onsæl*' (*Chron. Abingdon*, i, 439–42). In a recent edition of Abingdon charters, Kelly has argued that this Aethelwine was more probably a lay donor than the abbot of Abingdon of the same name who died in 1030 (2001). Aethelwine's *haga* must have been at the south end of the large block of land bounded by Queen St to the south and Cornmarket to the east. Another possible 'urban manor' may be associated with the church of St Mary the Virgin on the High Street, which seems to have belonged, with two houses in the town, to the Iffley estate of Aubrey Earl

of Northumbria at the time of Domesday Book (Blair 1994, 163). Traces of older properties may even still be visible in the 12th century. North of Aethelwine's *haga* in the 12th century was a large block of land bounded by St Michael's Street, New Inn Hall St and Cornmarket, and by Shoe Lane on the south. It contained on its west side a Norman stone house (later Frewin Hall) standing in open grounds, and the eastern half of the land was split into burgage plots, many of which owed rents to the owners of Frewin Hall (Blair 1978, 94–6). The land block on the opposite side of Cornmarket can also perhaps be identified from later documentary sources as a potential early estate (Sturdy and Munby 1985, 50). Several adjacent properties here belonged to the manor of Pyrton and were granted to various religious houses by William fitz Nigel in the early 12th century. It is also suggested that a court containing the church of St John the Baptist, which formed the nucleus of Merton College in 1266, may also have been an early estate; in 1266 the property was roughly half an acre in area (*VCH* iv, 8–9).

Archaeological evidence for the early occupation of the *burh* is very slight (see Fig. 2.4 for the locations of the sites discussed below). Three successive phases of 10th-century occupation were suggested at 11–18 Queen St (Gaz No. 85), comprising post-holes, stakeholes and a timber slot; pottery from these phases was predominantly Late Saxon Oxford Ware (Fabric B), with some early Medieval Oxford Ware (Fabric AC). No patterns could be discerned in the features, but they seem likely to have been structural in origin. The area where these features were found lay almost in the centre of the block of land defined by Queen St, St Ebbe's St, St Aldate's and Pembroke St, well back from the street frontages. Only very limited investigations were possible on the Queen St frontage, where a series of gravel road surfaces were recorded in section. At the east end of Queen St, excavations at No. 8 (Gaz No. 84; reported in full in this volume, Chapter 5 below) revealed a sequence of occupation layers of gravel, ash and charcoal that appeared to be contemporary with the series of early (and primary) street surfaces to the north and east. Activity along the line of the Thames crossing at this time is discussed below, and there is evidence for the building of structures near to the crossing line by the mid 10th century, if not before.

At All Saints Church on the High Street (Gaz No. 59; see Chapter 5 below for a full report), a combination of stratigraphic, radiocarbon and pottery evidence suggests that the features of phase 1 represent the earliest coherent structures known archaeologically from the *burh*. The earlier phase 1 features comprised a scatter of timber settings overlain by burnt grain; subsequently, in phase 1b a building was constructed at the east edge of the site, possibly of post-and-mud or clay wall construction. Finds included an iron collar from a tool, a knife and a fragment of worked lead waste. The burnt grain is of particular interest, since it appears to represent a

major accident to stored grain, comprising fully threshed and cleaned free-threshing wheat (All Saints Church, Chapter 5, below; Robinson, Chapter 7, below). The grain was radiocarbon dated to the period cal AD 880–1150 (HAR-466-I; HAR-466-II, Table A2.4), but the combination of this date with other evidence from the site in a revised model using a Bayesian approach suggests that the grain is probably datable to the period cal AD 890–1030 (see Marshall, Appendix 2 and Table A2.4). The probability distributions (Figs A2.4 and A2.5) suggest a very strong likelihood of a 10th-century date. Recent excavations some 100 m to the north-east at Lincoln College have revealed similar evidence of large quantities of burnt cereal grain deriving from early burnt layers that pre-dated the first buildings on the site (Gaz No. 123; Pelling 2002). Since the first buildings are dated to the early 11th century, it is likely that the grain is datable to the 10th century. Three samples contained fully processed, clean wheat, and the fourth, clean processed barley; Pelling suggests that this was almost certainly wheat being stored for bread making, with the barley perhaps being stored for malting to make beer. Two further samples, associated with the destruction of the first phase of buildings on the site, were of a different character, and appeared to represent semi-cleaned wheat, the product of fine sieving. The exceptional nature of the grain assemblages at All Saints and Lincoln College suggests that there might have been quite a substantial building or complex in this area that was associated with the large-scale storage of grain, and possibly with baking or malting (Pelling 2002). This raises the interesting possibility that this area of the *burh* may have been the location of granaries and bakehouses. It is possible that this may simply represent normal commercial activity clustering in a specific quarter of the town (cf Biddle and Keene 1976, 455, where localisation of trade is seen as far advanced in late 10th-century Winchester). Given the potentially very early dating, however, it could equally represent a more formal arrangement associated with the defence of the *burh*; perhaps there were granaries here for the storage of food for the *burh*'s defenders during times of trouble.

Other evidence for the early occupation of the *burh* comes from a number of burials excavated at St Aldate's Church and Christ Church, which have been radiocarbon dated to the 9th and 10th centuries, and have been discussed with the evidence for the mid Saxon minster of St Frideswide's, above.

A small number of coins have been found in the town centre. A coin of Edward the Elder of c 920, found on the primary street surface of New Inn Hall St, has been mentioned above. A rare halfpenny or farthing of Eadred (946–55), which was minted in Oxford by the moneyer Wynnelm, was found during excavations beneath the eastern defences of Oxford Castle in the early 1970s (Gaz No. 75). Metcalf has suggested that small denomination coins seem not to circulate as widely as pennies, and were perhaps produced for local use as small change

(1976, 269). Four coins were discovered during building operations at the old tower of St Martin's church at Carfax in 1896; these comprised a silver penny of Edward the Elder and three silver pennies of Athelstan (925–939) (Jope 1952/3, 108 no. 6). Although these coins were not recovered during a controlled excavation, the fact that all four were found in the same location could suggest that the central crossroads was an early focus for trade, or even minting. It is notable that a mould for casting silver ingots was found a little way to the north at the former Clarendon Hotel site (Gaz No. 33), although it could be either pre- or post-Conquest in date. Carfax and Cornmarket Street would have been prime town-centre locations in the late Saxon town, and it is interesting to note that, at Winchester, the late Saxon moneyers were located in the central part of the High Street, a prime site probably occupied by men who formed the commercial élite of the town (Biddle and Keene 1976, 459). Most recently, at Oxford, the Lincoln College excavations discussed above have added an Edgar Reform Small Cross silver coin datable to the period 972/3–5 to the town's coin list.

The date and context of the *burh*'s foundation

Brief mention may be made here of the different elements of evidence for the date and context of the *burh*'s foundation; although the archaeological evidence can at present make only a limited contribution to this debate, it raises interesting questions. It is clear from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that Oxford was in existence by 911–12, when Edward the Elder annexed it from the Mercians, but it was not certainly a defended town until it appears in the Burghal Hidage (currently dated to the period 914–919). Hassall took the view that although other options were possible, it was perhaps safest to regard Edward the Elder as responsible for the town's defences (1986, 118), implying a date for the formal creation of the *burh* between 911 and 914–919. There is, however, also some evidence for an earlier origin, during the reign of Alfred. This derives from the existence of a silver penny bearing Alfred's name and the mint-name *Ohsnaforda*, by the moneyer Bernwald at Oxford. Numerous Danelaw imitations of this coin are known, and it was for long believed that the Alfred *Ohsnaforda* coin was itself an imitation. However, it is now thought likely that the coin was indeed minted at Oxford late in Alfred's reign (Metcalf 1976, 269 and n. 114). Although not all Anglo-Saxon mints were in fortified towns, Blair has pointed out that those that first appear in Alfred's last years were essentially part of the expanding burghal system (1994, 101). Thus a date of foundation in the late 880s or 890s is a distinct possibility; Alfred took London in 886 and this seems to have enabled him to establish formal overlordship over the Mercian ruler Ealdorman Aethelred, who subsequently married Alfred's daughter, Aethelflaed. Alfred will therefore have

had clear authority over the Oxford region, through Aethelred and Aethelflaed, from 886 onwards. Aethelred and Aethelflaed were active participants in the king's policy of *burh* creation (see Brooks 1996, 143, for their association with London and Worcester in the last decade of Alfred's reign), and Blair has suggested that they may well have been the instigators of the building of the *burh* at Oxford, within the control of the king of Wessex, but on the north bank of the Thames and thus in Mercian territory (1994, 101).

There is no doubt that more research is needed to resolve the unsatisfactory and apparently contradictory evidence for the proposed division of late Saxon Oxford into a primary *burh* and eastern extension. Little attention has been paid recently to the possibility that the *burh* may have originated in Alfred's reign rather than Edward's, and there has been little critical archaeological examination of the suggestion that the eastern extension is of early 11th-century date. There has perhaps been a tendency to assume that the inconsistencies in the archaeological evidence are the result of the limited excavation opportunities; that if we look long enough and in the right place we will find what we expect to find, rather than that the strange contradictions in the archaeological and historical record may mean that we have not properly understood a complex sequence of events, and that we need to re-evaluate our present archaeological model. In so doing, it should not necessarily be taken for granted that the extension of the enclosed area was prompted purely by short-term defensive considerations, even if it might have been presented as such by the authorities. Alfred and all his successors saw the *burh* not simply as a fort and a refuge, but as a source of revenue (and this was urgently needed for dealing with the Vikings, whether by battle or pay-offs). The *burh* also served as a focal point for administration and law enforcement in a time when the kings were actively seeking to extend their control. We should be prepared to think much more broadly about the motives that might have prompted the extension of a primary *burh* at Oxford, and the date when this could have happened. For example, Edward the Elder's acquisition of London and Oxford following the death of Aethelred in 911 was a significant political act and it is by no means impossible that this was followed by a programme of development and enhancement of a small *burh* at Oxford. On the basis of the present archaeological evidence, this could have included the surfacing of the streets and even the expansion of the enclosed area, and could have been undertaken for a variety of political and economic motives, as well as for defence. Brooks (1996, 143–4) draws attention to the economic value of the *burh* as a source of royal and seigniorial revenue deriving from market tolls, rents and court fines. The eastern extension of Oxford could even be seen as a means by which a growing eastern suburb was brought within the jurisdiction of the *burh* for primarily economic reasons, and this could have

happened at almost any point during the 10th or early 11th century. We are surely wrong to assume that late Saxon town founders were more simplistic and naive in their motivation than their 12th- and 13th-century successors.

The Thames Crossing from the foundation of the *burh* to the Norman Conquest

The development of the Thames crossing south of the walled town before the foundation of the *burh* has been reviewed above. In summary, it is clear that a substantial crossing existed before c 900, based on the alluvial islands in the Thames floodplain. A wooden trestle bridge had been built across at least part of the route, and attempts had been made to stabilise channel and island edges with wattle revetments, in the face of repeated flooding. Flax retting was taking place in channels, and quantities of scrap leather shoes were found in silt layers over the bank of one of the islands. During the late Saxon period activity intensified in the area; there are the first signs of deliberate land reclamation and settlement, and a stone ford may represent a new element of the crossing, or the enhancement of an old one. The channels and islands that are likely to have existed at this time are discussed by Robinson (Chapter 3 below) and shown in Figure 3.9; the evidence is summarised in Figure 2.4. For ease of reference, the northern island of the crossing will be referred to as Island 1, and the southern, Island 2.

The stone ford (Gaz No. 93) is the only definite element of the crossing that is datable to the late Saxon period. The upstream edge of the ford was seen in a narrow trench excavated just to the west of the street frontage of St Aldate's (Plate 2.5); it had been laid directly on the gravel bed of the river. From its location in relation to the main roadway the excavator suggested that it could have been up to 7 m wide. It was of variable construction, principally of close packed rubble, comprising small slabs of Corallian stone laid flat but heavily abraded on all



Plate 2.5 The late Saxon ford seen at 65 St Aldate's, 1981.

faces as though they had been rolled. An environmental sample taken from silt just above the stones showed a typical stream/river-bed fauna, confirming that it was indeed a true ford. Also present were aquatic and waterside species of a well-vegetated river, and an assemblage of many plant and insect remains that were urban in character. The location of the ford is shown on Figure 2.4, in the channel between Islands 1 and 2. Robinson (Chapter 3, below) suggests that there might have been a summer water level here of about 0.30 m. A sample of loose wattles from the stonework was submitted for radiocarbon dating (HAR-5340) and gave a date range of cal AD 880–1190; the probability distribution (Fig. A2.1) shows a strong likelihood that the wattles date to before AD 1000, and ten sherds of pottery from three successive silt layers over the ford showed a progression of fabric types consistent with the abandonment of the ford in the late 11th century. Deep silting layers over the stones suggested that the ford was being buried rapidly in the first half of the 12th century, and loose wattles from the middle of the silt sequence gave a radiocarbon date of cal AD 1020–1300 (Har-5339). The ford could have co-existed with the timber bridge constructed before the foundation of the *burh*, with the bridge perhaps being used for pedestrians and the ford, running parallel, for carts and stock. However, there is virtually no overlap in the radiocarbon date ranges for the two structures, and no evidence for the ford was seen alongside the bridge in the BT Tunnel excavations (Chapter 3, below).

Elsewhere along the line of the crossing, more attempts were being made to stabilise the edges of the channels and the island banks. The northern tip of Island 2 had been revetted in the mid Saxon period (see above), and the effort put into preserving this bankside in the late Saxon period suggests that it was a critical element in the crossing. Excavations at 56–60 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 92, published in full in Chapter 3, below) showed four phases of wattle revetments around the west side of the island tip, moving gradually further out into the channel as earlier revetments were buried under fresh alluvium (Fig. 3.28; Plates 3.11–3.12). There is also clear evidence for the dumping of animal bone and leather waste into the channel in the mid to late 10th century, probably to assist the process of reclamation.

Further north, revetment of the south-west edge of Island 1 was suggested by evidence at 65 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 93). Here, observations of a contractors' excavation (Trench II) identified stake and wattle fences in the upper levels of alternating layers of peaty material, silt and gravel. Another contractors' excavation (Trench IV), slightly to the north-west, showed the alluvial bank faced on the west by a wattle fence; further silting was contained by a north-south row of posts with horizontal planks. One of the planks had two holes, perhaps enlarged nail holes, and a clench-bolt was recovered at the same time. This suggested the reuse of boat timbers

in a riverbank structure replacing the earlier wattle revetment. A radiocarbon determination obtained on the Trench IV wattle (HAR-5341) gave a date range of cal AD 770–1160; the probability distribution suggests that the wattle is very likely to be 10th-century in date (Table A2.2; Fig. A2.1). On the opposite side of Island 1, excavations at St Aldate's Police Station (Gaz No. 101, reported in full in Chapter 3, below) revealed a line of 51 timber uprights, mostly stakes, which had been driven through the silt along the edge of the bank (Fig. 3.23; Plate 3.8). A number of cut oak planks had been inserted behind the stakes at the north end of the row, possibly for reinforcement. A gap of approximately 1 m width appeared to have been left in the stake line at a point opposite a hollow in the bankside; a single post had been driven into the silts behind the gap. No trace of any horizontals was found, which suggests that this was not a simple revetment of the kind seen elsewhere. Lines of stakes driven into the water's edge were used in Viking Age towns in Scandinavia as a defence against enemy shipping. This seems implausible here, both from the relatively small size of the stakes and from the likelihood that the water was too shallow. However, the stakes could mark another sort of defensive gesture; perhaps the private defence of a bankside and inlet used for fishing, for the localised movement of goods, or for activities such as flax retting. Two environmental samples (Nos 201 and 202, see Robinson, Chapter 7, below) contained a few capsule fragments of flax, which could have resulted from flax rippling in the channel, or from flax retting upstream. Even less salubrious were the remains of cereal bran and corncockle seeds characteristic of human sewage found in sample 201. The samples also suggested a muddy bankside, on which golden dock, pale persicaria and willow trees were growing. Three of the planks were dated by dendrochronology (see Table A2.1 and HILLAM and MILES, Chapter 7, below), and HILLAM and MILES comment that it is likely all three were felled in the period 973–1018. They may, of course, have been re-used from elsewhere (perhaps from boats, as seen on the opposite side of the island), and if so it is unclear whether the structure is of pre- or post-Conquest date. However, given that the planks appeared to have been inserted to reinforce an earlier line of stakes, the structure seems likely at least to have originated in the late Saxon period. Early 11th-century evidence from much closer to the crossing line at Land adjoining the Police Station (Gaz No. 100, reported in full in Chapter 3, below) suggested that land was being reclaimed from the channel, although it was unclear whether this represented reclamation southwards from Island 1, or eastwards from the crossing.

At the north end of the crossing (89–91 St Aldate's, Gaz No. 96, reported in full in Chapter 3, below), the west/east-flowing channel between Island 1 and the *burh* continued to deposit silts on the bankside, burying earlier wattle revetments (see above).

The channel edge was again cut back, and more wattle fences were inserted; one of these was radiocarbon dated to the period cal AD 770–1160 (HAR-8362), with the probability distribution showing a strong likelihood that this happened before the end of the 10th century (Table A2.2; Fig. A2.1). More flooding followed, with further silt building up against the bank and over the fences. Above the silt was a layer of compressed vegetation, which suggests that at least for a while the bank dried out long enough to allow colonisation by plants. A bundle of wood lengths, one of them roughly squared, that was found in the vegetation layers could represent an abandoned attempt at further repair. Despite some subsequent flooding, the notably poor organic preservation in the uppermost silt suggests that the site was at last beginning to dry out by the second quarter of the 11th century. An increase in animal bone suggests that this was assisted by increased dumping of rubbish at the water's edge. On the bankside north of the channel two phases of wattle-lined gullies were identified; the later gullies were associated with a low gravel mound 0.7–0.9 m wide with a fence at its south edge, and an area of irregularly pitched pieces of limestone (Plates 3.2, 3.3). Three radiocarbon dates from elements of this sequence gave dates of cal AD 890–1290 (HAR-5344), cal AD 890–1290 (HAR-5346), and cal AD 770–1160 (HAR-5343) (Table A2.2). The gullies were overlain by apparently deliberate dumping of gravelly clay with much animal bone, and the pottery suggested that the dumping was datable to the early to mid 11th century. Environmental samples from this sequence showed that flooding was occurring, but that the area was probably seasonally dry with temporary pools of stagnant water set in a muddy bankside. Water mint and gypsy wort were growing along the edge of the channel, and the stagnant pools may have developed a carpeting of duckweed when the general water level receded. Celery leaved crow-foot, marsh yellow-cress, red shank, pale persicaria and golden dock grew on the bankside, and there was a suggestion of drier land nearby, where fat hen and nettles were growing in a disturbed, nutrient-rich environment. Flax seeds and capsule fragments suggest that the wattle-lined gullies were used for flax retting; the same process was seen a little to the south at 79–80 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 94), where a similar wattle-lined gully had been used for flax retting in the 9th century. Beetles that favour indoor habitats were present, together with the woodworm beetles *Anobium punctatum* and *Lyctus linearis*. These are suggestive of buildings and human habitation.

The character of timber revetment structures has not hitherto been studied in Oxford, but the 56–60 St Aldate's excavations in particular provided evidence of a possible building sequence. The earliest (Phase 2) revetment dates to before the mid 10th century, and consisted of roughly-shaped earthfast posts into which horizontal wood (mainly branches) was

woven. The result can be seen as a strong but very crude form of wattling (Fig. 3.28). In contrast, the Phase 4 revetment (early to mid 11th century) was made from a more formal wattle hurdle (other flat hurdles were present in Phase 3 deposits). The slender vertical posts of the hurdles were 0.3 to 0.45 m apart, but more substantial supporting posts may have existed outside the excavation area.

Evidence for the first construction of buildings along the line of the Thames crossing was also seen at the two northernmost sites, 79–80 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 94) and 89–91 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 96; this volume Chapter 3, below), in both cases close to the line of the crossing itself. The site at 79–80 St Aldate's (on the west bank of Island 1) appeared to have been abandoned for perhaps as much as 70 years while the river deposited silt over the early fences of the island bank, and over the wattle-lined flax retting gully. The site seems to have been reoccupied from the second quarter of the 10th century, when a layer of clean sand and gravel was laid over the silts as a building platform, and over this there was a laminated ashy floor. Two large postholes were recorded, and a layer of partially burnt clay may have resulted from the destruction of daub, but there was no clear evidence for walls. The excavator commented that it seemed there was no longer any danger of flooding at the site, and this can perhaps be compared with the evidence for generally drier conditions further north at 89–91 St Aldate's (see above). This was succeeded by a second building on a slightly different alignment. The second building had a north-south wall that appeared to have no construction trench, and to have been formed of mud. Two postsettings suggested that the wall incorporated posts, in a form of construction very similar to the earliest building at All Saints Church (see above). One of the postholes contained a fragment of quern as a base stone. To the east, a layer of sand had been spread on the interior of the building, with ashy floors building up over it and banking up against the wall. To the west was a stone surface with a number of small timber settings. Heavy staining of the underlying gravel suggested that this may have been a yard in which animals were kept. Finds from the buildings included a heckle tooth and a piece of cut antler tine, and numerous objects of bone including a toggle, a bodkin, needles and a spindlewhorl; there were also objects of stone, including the quern fragment (possibly of Millstone Grit from central or northern England), a limestone spindlewhorl probably of local origin, and a honestone of fine grained limestone, possibly Purbeck or Jurassic Oolite from the north-east Midlands/Yorkshire area. The pottery was predominantly of the Late Saxon Oxford Ware shelly tradition, and the very low representation of St Neot's ware, which became the dominant tradition in Oxford in the early 11th century, inclined the excavator to prefer a 10th-century dating for both phases of activity. The pottery included over 70

cooking pot rims, 5 bowl rims and 7 rims from shallow dishes.

At 89–91 St Aldate's (on the north bank of the channel) no reliable building plan could be constructed, but there is little doubt that some form of wooden structure was built on the site, with a gravel and clay floor, and an external wattle-lined gully, probably for drainage (Plates 3.5, 3.6). The building was constructed using earthfast posts, some driven and some in postholes, together with a horizontal timber set into a dug slot, probably to form a baseplate for a partition. Three of the timbers survived *in situ*. A layer of brown sandy silt overlying these features suggests that the area flooded, but the occupants appear to have tried again, and a second gravel-floored timber structure was built over the top of the first. Again, the form of this structure could not be understood, but it contained similar elements of a timber slot and lines of postholes. More *in situ* timbers were recovered. A total of eight timbers were dated by dendrochronology (see Table A2.1 and Hiram and Miles, Chapter 7 below), giving a combined felling date range for the whole group of AD 925–963. Hiram and Miles comment that this probably dates the primary construction of the features, although if the timbers were stockpiled a date in the middle or towards the end of the range would be more likely. It is interesting to note that the use of both posts and baseplates in the same building can be paralleled at the Fish Street Hill excavations in London, in a structure of the mid 10th to early 11th centuries or earlier (Horsman *et al.* 1988, 71), but this is the first definite example of its kind to be found in Oxford.

Life in the developing late Saxon town

From the later 10th century, there is much more evidence for housing and the development of permanent occupation within the town. The Castle Street section shows that road maintenance continued, with regular resurfacings of this principal street. The frontages of the main axial streets were built up during this period, although the evidence discussed above for the existence of 'urban manors' suggests that the building-up of the frontage need not necessarily imply the first occupation of a particular plot of land. Evidence for three successive phases of 10th-century occupation in the middle of a plot was seen at 11–18 Queen St (Gaz No 85; see also above), and Sturdy and Munby (1985, 92) have suggested that buildings along the street frontage may have been ancillary to larger buildings set back from the road. The development of the street frontages may therefore have been secondary, and commercially motivated, to create shops and workshops along the principal streets as the town's economy grew; many of these may have been let for rent rather than retained by the principal occupant or holder of the plot.

Four opportunities to record late Saxon occupation in Cornmarket arose in advance of redevelopment between 1955 and 1970 (Gaz Nos 31, 33, 34

and 35; see Figs 5.1 and 5.2 for site locations). The results are of great interest, although access was often severely constrained by time pressures and recording was generally limited to observation of contractors' trenches, with a few opportunities for archaeological excavation of very small areas. Medieval and post-medieval development of this major street frontage meant that Saxon ground surfaces rarely survived, and most of the features seen were those that had been cut into the underlying natural gravel. A bias towards deep features is therefore inevitable in these results, and evidence for slighter structures such as fences, for ground-level buildings and for surface-laid features was only very occasionally seen. All the excavations revealed evidence for structures of the type now generally known as cellar-pits. These have been widely recognised in late Saxon and Viking towns throughout England and seem to be a characteristic, if short-lived, element of urban building tradition in 10th- and 11th-century contexts throughout the country. They range in size from small cellar-pits a few metres square, to very substantial underground or half-sunken rooms comparable to the undercrofts of the later medieval period. The evidence for this building type in Oxford has been reviewed by Sturdy and Munby (1985, 92–4), although in general the structural evidence surviving in Oxford has been less good than elsewhere, and the most comprehensive survey of cellar-pit types has been produced for London (Horsman *et al.* 1988). Many cellar-pits in Oxford seem to have been lined with walls of wattle and daub, or, in the case of the larger cellars, walls constructed of planks and posts; many also had evidence of made floors. A discussion of the larger Oxford cellars can be found in Chapter 5, below, and in the recently published report on the site at 113–119 High St (Gaz No. 118; Walker and King 2000).

Only one of the four sites was located on the east side of Cornmarket (Gaz No. 31), and it revealed a large area of undisturbed natural loamy topsoil east of the modern street line, which may have been within the late Saxon street, or may have been an open area within a large land plot. In the limited area available for excavation only two pits of 10th- or 11th-century date could be examined in detail. These are described by the excavator as probably small larder or storage pits.

Work on the west side of the street has revealed pits, wells and cellar-pits of late Saxon date along the street frontage. The northernmost site (Gaz No. 34) revealed seven pits that appeared from pottery evidence to have been infilled in the 11th century; these were concentrated along the street frontage and the north edge of the site. All the late Saxon pits were rectangular, and had been cut into natural gravel without any lining. One of them, pit 36, was partly archaeologically excavated, and appears to have been a cellar pit. It stood towards the front of the site, beneath the modern pavement, and measured approximately 3 × 2.5 m; several pieces of

burnt daub with impressed wattle marks were found in the fill.

Similar evidence, but on a much larger scale, had previously been recorded some 40 m to the south at the Clarendon Hotel (Gaz No. 33; the site plan is reproduced as Fig. 2.6). Here there was an opportunity to observe an area extending some 65–70 m back from the street line, in which at least nine late Saxon cellar pits were recorded. The circumstances in which these buildings were recorded are described in detail by Jope and Pantin (1958, 1–34) and much was undoubtedly missed. Nevertheless, this remains the most extensive area of the late Saxon town yet seen in Oxford, and the patterning of the buildings is very striking, suggesting the presence of at least four east/west-aligned building plots, each with a frontage of roughly 10–12 m (35 to 40 ft) to the street. The buildings seem to have been approximately aligned on Cornmarket, although slightly askew, and Jope comments (*ibid.*, 6) that the street frontage itself was probably irregular. The dating evidence is in general not precise enough to clarify how many of the late Saxon structures were in use simultaneously, although almost all are probably attributable to the first half of the 11th century. Each plot seems to have been fronted by a small rectangular cellar-pit.

The best-preserved of these was structure B1A, which measured roughly 2.5 × 2.5 m in plan, and was cut over 2 m into the natural gravel. There was no evidence for an internal lining here, or at any of the road-frontage cellar-pits. Three small postholes and a number of stakeholes around the outside of B1A may represent the support for a wooden floor covering the pit, and there seems to have been a narrow entranceway at its south-west corner. Some 3 m behind the frontage cellar-pits was a second row, also apparently small structures. In one case (pits D1A and D1B) the second-row pit was said to be earlier than the front-row pit, although the evidence for this is not clear. Two of the pits in this second row showed evidence of having been lined: pit A1C with clay, and pit B1D possibly with timber, as impressions of stakes were seen in its east face. Two further small cellar-pits were seen beneath the 12th-century stone vaulted cellar, one (VI) later than the other (VII). Wells towards the street frontage seem to have been later than the cellar-pits and may thus be associated with a subsequent phase of use of the site (in square B1 arguably with the mid 12th-century stone vaulted cellar). Wells of late Saxon date seem to have been behind the rows of cellar-pits, in areas where very few structures were

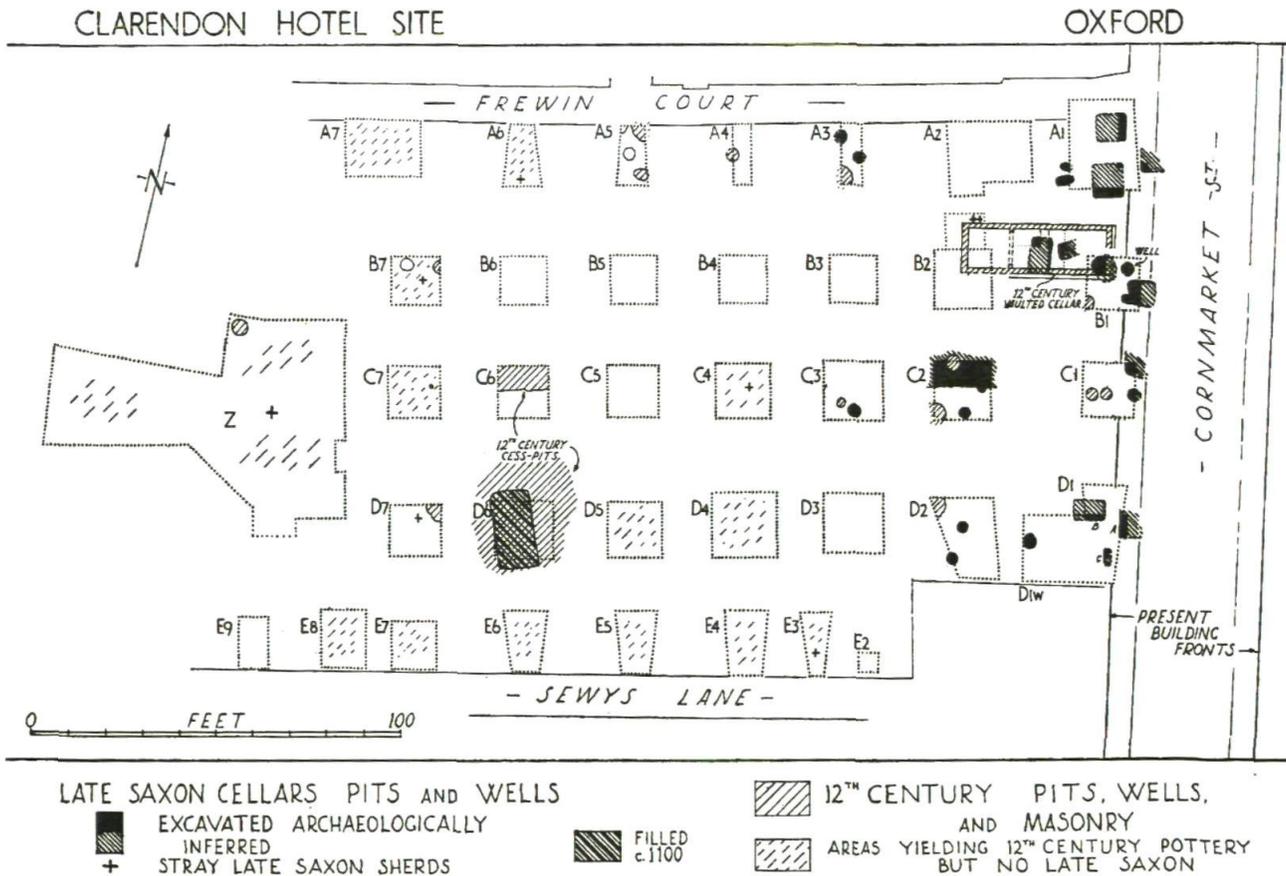


Figure 2.6 Late Saxon and Norman cellar pits at the Clarendon Hotel site (first published in E M Jope 'The Clarendon Hotel, Oxford, Part I: the site', *Oxoniensia* 23 (1958), fig. 1). Sewys Lane is now Shoe Lane.

recorded, which Jope suggests (*ibid.*, 6–7) may have been open plots.

Two large cellars were excavated. One, structure C2B, appears not to have been completely excavated, but measured a minimum of 6 × 3 m in plan, and had been cut roughly 1.4 m deep into the natural gravel. No evidence for any internal features was seen, apart from a possible drainage sump in the south-east corner. This cellar lay at least 12 m behind the street frontage cellar-pits. Its long axis was aligned at right-angles to Cornmarket St, as was the long axis of the 12th-century stone vaulted cellar to its north. The second large cellar, D6A, was set very much further back, roughly 50 m from the street frontage cellar-pits. Its dimensions were similar to those of cellar C2B, although it was twice as deep, and its long axis was aligned approximately parallel to Cornmarket. Although most of the fill had been removed by a late 12th-century cess-pit, what survived suggested that the cellar had been infilled in the late 11th or early 12th centuries.

No clear evidence for an overlying building was recovered for any of the cellar-pits on the site, although Jope (*ibid.*, 6) was of the view that each one must have been covered by a detached building. Sturdy and Munby (1985, 93) have suggested that the small, roughly square cellar pits represent a distinct class of buildings and can be paralleled at other sites in Oxford. They are sometimes unlined, and sometimes lined with clay or wattle, but they lack the structural timbers associated with the distinct group of larger cellars (see below). Sturdy and Munby (*ibid.*) argue that the small cellar-pits probably stood within larger structures, and provided storage space, perhaps for goods such as meat, dairy produce and beverages that would have benefited from cool conditions. They have suggested that the cellar pits could even have been storage below stalls along the edges of the market place (*ibid.*, 92) and the street frontage row of cellar-pits at the Clarendon Hotel looks very like some such arrangement. The larger cellars (such as C2B and D6A) should probably be regarded as cellared houses, with the superstructure taken up on the same plan area (*ibid.*, 93).

Possible evidence for slightly earlier arrangements came from the fourth Cornmarket site (Gaz No. 35; the site plan is reproduced as Fig. 2.7), located a short distance south of the Clarendon Hotel site. A phase of activity dated to the 10th century is proposed (Phase A), comprising a number of larger and smaller pits along the (modern) street frontage, together with a shallow sunken hut measuring 3.2 × 1.5 m in plan, with a posthole in the centre of its eastern end. A broad gully outside the sunken hut may have provided drainage for a thatched roof, and the fact that the gully was filled with ash and charcoal suggests that the building had burned down. Seven postholes and 23 stakeholes were recorded close by, and must represent further structures, although their form could not be reconstructed. In the 11th century (Phase B) this was

superseded by a very large cellar, B1, measuring 9.2 × 4.6 m in plan, and in excess of 1.45 m in depth. The cellar walls were nearly vertical, and appeared to have been lined with timber. The floor was of earth or timber, and it was thought likely that there would have been a complete timber structure around and above the cellar, with at least one floor at ground level (Sturdy and Munby 1985, 67). The long axis of the building was aligned at right-angles to Cornmarket, and probably stood at least 2.8–3 m back from the late Saxon street frontage. To the rear of the building were numerous large pits and possible wells, one of which may have been a cellar-pit.

Excavations at the west end of Queen St (Gaz No. 86) revealed evidence of very dense occupation, of 10th- to mid 11th-century date. A cellar-pit measuring 2.6 × 2 m, and at least 1.52 m deep, was partially excavated in the north-west corner of the site, south of the presumed line of the late Saxon street frontage. Numerous slots and recesses around its south and east sides suggested that it had been lined with timber, and it may also have had a clay lining. It appeared to have been infilled in the early to mid 11th century. Roughly 5 m to the east was a possible sunken hut measuring 2.13 × 2.44+ m; a large shallow pit some 2 m further east may have been another sunken hut, but could not be fully investigated. As in Cornmarket numerous pits and wells clustered to the rear of these features. Further back from the street frontage were more pits, including a further example of a possible cellar-pit. Pits of the 10th and 11th century on the Queen St frontage were reported from 11–18 Queen St (Gaz No. 85), and two possible cellar pits were seen at the east end of the street, at No. 4 and No. 7 (Gaz Nos 83 and 84; see full report in Chapter 5, below). These had been cut through layers of early metalled and gravel surfaces, and seem to represent encroachment on the street at a point where it may have widened to form an open area (see above).

At All Saints Church (Gaz No. 59; see full report in Chapter 5 below) there was rare evidence for a posthole building dating to the later 10th century. A single row of postholes was seen, 8.5 m long and aligned at right-angles to the High St (Fig. 5.7, Phase 2a). A yard area to the west may have been associated with a further building plot lying between the excavated site and Turl St, the only evidence for which was a series of floor surfaces seen north of the street metalling in an external sewer connection trench. Scant evidence for a plot to the east of the excavated building was seen in a lightwell, which revealed a north/south-aligned beamslot, postholes and fragments of burnt daub, with fragments of floors to the west. A radiocarbon date from a burnt fence (HAR-419) suggests that the buildings were destroyed by fire in the late 10th or early 11th century, and it has been suggested that this may represent the documented sack of Oxford by the Danes in 1009 in reprisal for the massacre of St Brice's day. Subsequently, a large cellar was constructed on

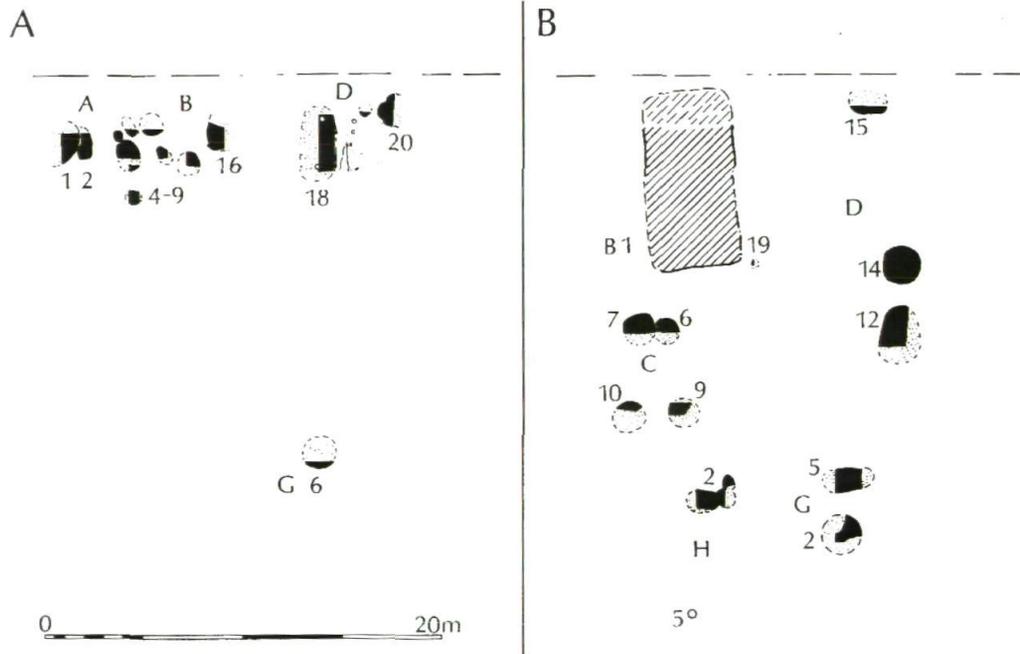


Figure 2.7 Late Saxon and Norman buildings at 55-58 Cornmarket St (first published in D Sturdy and J Munby 'Early Domestic Sites in Oxford: excavations in Cornmarket and Queen St, 1959-62', *Oxoniensia* 50 (1985), fig. 10). Cornmarket St is at the top of the plan.

the site, measuring at least 6.5×3.5 m in plan, and at least 2.3 m deep below the contemporary ground surface (Fig. 5.10, Phase 3). The cellar had been lined with timber, and there was slight evidence for pebble and gravel floors. The cellar appears to have been backfilled by the middle of the 11th century. Two keys were associated with the cellar, perhaps deriving from locked storage on the site; the first was an iron key with a ring bow and hollow stem (Fig. 6.18 No. 21) from the lowest fill, and the other was a padlock key (Fig. 6.18 No. 19). A small length of chain (Fig. 6.19 No. 41) from the pit fill may have had some similar kind of function.

On the opposite side of the High Street, recent excavations have revealed up to five more cellars of the first half of the 11th century (Gaz No. 118; site plan reproduced as Fig. 2.8), in a configuration that is remarkably reminiscent of the Clarendon Hotel site. A trench close to the High Street revealed what was probably a small, roughly square cellar pit (5016) on the frontage of Nos 116-117, of the type that occupied the street frontage in Cornmarket. A ground-level building stood to the rear of this cellar. Only the back part of the building survived, and its relationship to the street frontage cellar was not clear, although the excavator has suggested that the ground-level building might have been constructed slightly later, after the frontage building had been demolished (Walker and King 2000, 390). The only remains of the ground-level building comprised a clay floor with an ash accumulation, just to the north of a beam trench that presumably marked the back wall. To the rear of the house were gravel

yard surfaces. Another cellar-pit had been dug in the yard, and a stone flagged threshold had been laid between the cellar and back of the building. This cellar was a substantial structure, probably approximately 2 m deep; it could not be completely excavated, but measured at least 3×2 m in plan. Soil stains suggested that it had been lined with a double skin of planks or wattles mounted on closely-spaced stakes. The ground-level building was subsequently rebuilt or repaired, and in its later phase there is evidence for two rooms to either side of a north-south beamslot.

Another cellar (376/370) lay a short distance to the south-east, to the rear of No. 116. It was unclear whether there was one cellar here, or two, but the excavator notes that the profile of the cellar floors and the proximity of the two features suggests it is more likely that feature 370 was an access well for a cellar (376) to the north. This is reminiscent of cellar-pit B1A at the Clarendon Hotel, where a possible access way was identified (see above). Cellar 376 measured at least 3×4 m in plan, although it could not be completely excavated. Its deepest level was 1.82 m below the original ground surface, although it was shallower to the south. A sequence of floors were principally of compacted gravel and sandy clay.

Excavation was not possible at the frontage of No. 115, but to the rear of the plot a very large cellar was constructed (cellar 3160). The cellar measured approximately 9×7 m, with its long axis aligned at right-angles to the High Street, and it was probably 1.93 m deep. In its original form the cellar had gravel floors, and was lined with planks or wattle panels retained by

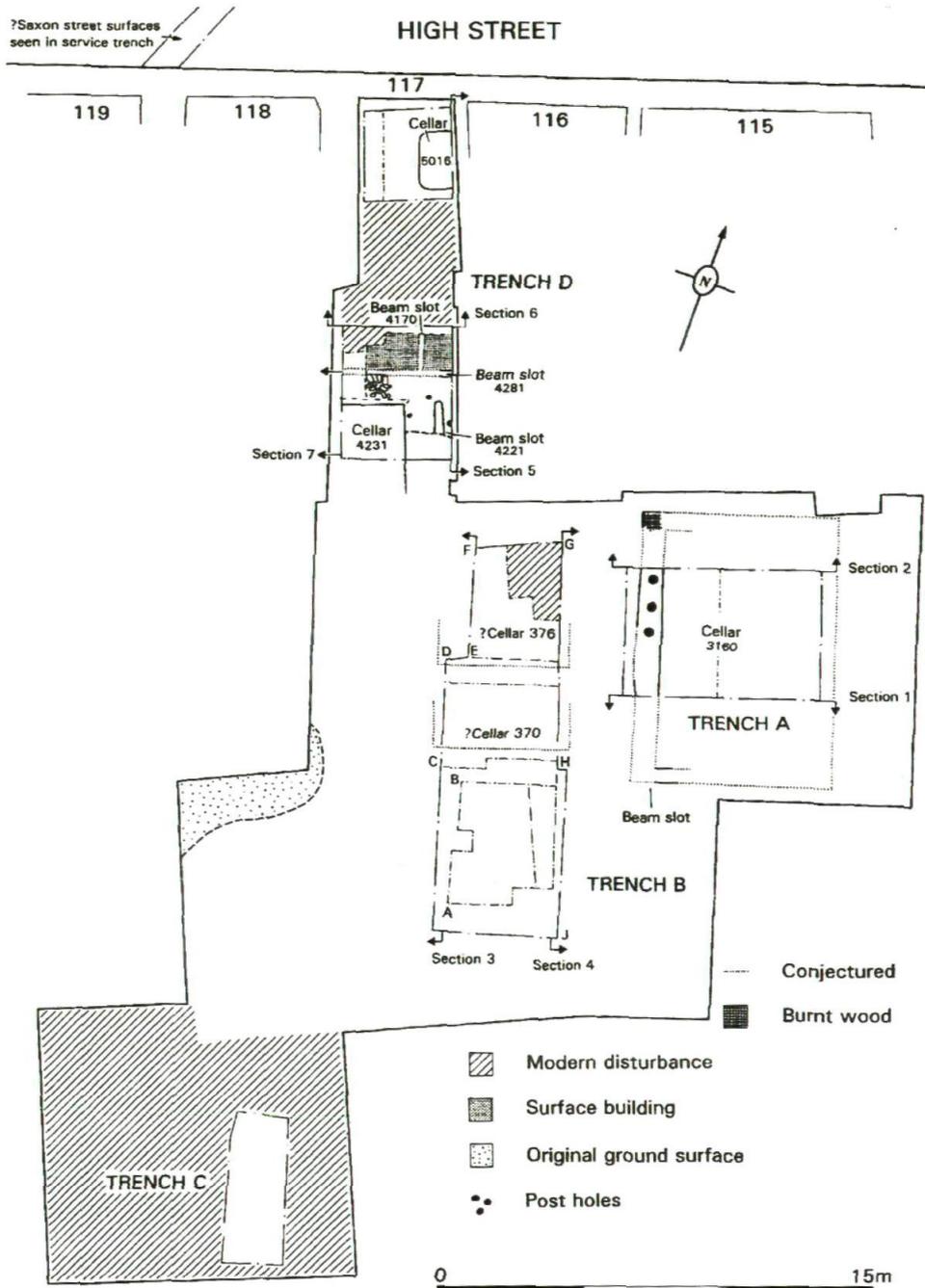


Figure 2.8 10th- and 11th-century buildings at 113–119 High Street (first published in G Walker and R King 'Early medieval and later tenements at 113–119 High Street, Oxford: excavations in 1993–5', *Oxoniensia* 65 (2000), fig. 2).

earthfast posts, with a packing of gravel and soil between the timber and the pit edge. The timber lining was later replaced or repaired, and the second lining appears to have employed timber baseplates into which the uprights were socketed. The cellar lay well back from the street frontage, and is interpreted as the lower storey of a ground-level building; the timbers of the cellar were sufficiently substantial to have been of integral construction with an upper level taken up on the same plan area.

Jope has suggested that the remains identified further east along the High Street, at the new University Examination Schools in the 19th century, as a British village of pit dwellings was in fact an area of cellar-pits of early to mid 11th-century type, lying very close to the medieval Eastgate of the town (Plate 1.1; Gaz No. 58; see also Jope 1956a, fig. 39; 1958, 10).

Evidence of late Saxon occupation away from the major street frontages has been found in a number

of locations. At Church St (Gaz No. 24) excavations revealed only rubbish and cess pits; four of these were thought to be of 10th-century date, including one that cut the north edge of the metalled street surface, but the majority were datable to the 11th century, including some of later 11th-century date. There was no evidence here for cellar-pits of the kind seen on the major axial streets at this date, nor was there any sign of property boundaries. It was suggested that the pits might have been at the rear of a property fronting eastwards onto St Ebbe's St, rather than southwards onto Church St (Hassall *et al.* 1989, 109). Small scale excavations at Logic Lane towards the east of the 11th-century town, roughly 90 m south of the High Street, found three rubbish pits containing a very substantial group of St Neot's ware pottery and animal bone (Gaz No. 63). Evidence for possible beamslots, or a row of postholes, suggests that there may have been a boundary here between properties fronting northwards onto the High Street and properties fronting southwards onto Merton St (arguably the intramural street in this part of the town). The medieval lane of Kybald St was laid out in this area around 1130, and may have formalised this boundary (Radcliffe 1961/2, 45–6, 68). A possible 11th- to 12th-century building was identified in a contractor's trench at 18–24 New Inn Hall Street (Gaz No. 72), which appeared to be fronting onto Shoe Lane.

Recent excavations at Lincoln College (Gaz No. 123) immediately south of Brasenose Lane have located at least two phases of buildings; during the earlier phase of buildings there is evidence for two post-built structures, succeeded in the second phase by a large building with walls of wattle and daub, that incorporated an internal partition and a cellar-pit. A coin of Edgar, dating to the period 972/3–5, was found in a pit probably dug to bury rubbish following the demolition of the earlier buildings. The coin seems to have been redeposited, however, since the pottery dates the earlier phase of buildings to the early 11th century, and the cellared building to the later 11th century. There was evidence for small-scale metalworking on the site, and substantial charred plant and faunal remains provided excellent evidence for diet and food processing (see below).

Buildings and street frontages: conclusions

The above evidence suggests a number of very tentative conclusions for investigation in future archaeological research in the city. It now seems likely that the systematic development of the principal street frontages was a feature of the late 10th and early 11th centuries. While the deep cellar pits of this period could arguably have removed evidence for earlier frontage structures, the pottery assemblages are (at least on the basis of current interpretations) overwhelmingly early to mid 11th-century in nature and do not suggest significant redeposition of material from earlier occupation. The types of buildings found on these sites in numerous

locations suggest that development took the form of the creation of smaller plots on the edges of larger areas, to exploit the commercial potential of the town's growing economy. These plots may have been deliberately created by the holders of the larger areas, and used both for their own trading purposes, and arguably to be let out for rent. This development appears to have been secondary; earlier occupation of the town could well have been organised on the basis of much larger plots, and both the principal houses and the ancillary structures associated with these may lie well back from the street frontages.

Small cellar-pits were built on the street front of the plots, perhaps representing the storage facilities for above-ground shops or stalls, although the evidence for the superstructure of such buildings has not generally survived. Other buildings were established behind the 'shops', and were perhaps workshops, further storage and possibly living accommodation. These 'second row' buildings had cellars, several of which were seen at the Clarendon Hotel, but the evidence from 113–119 High Street suggests that there may also have been ground-level buildings here. At 113–119 High Street a 'second-row' cellar lay in the yard area behind a ground-level building. Substantial buildings of the cellared hall form lay further back still, and probably incorporated living accommodation at ground-level. Whether these were associated with the 'trade' buildings at the front of the plots, or whether they represent the houses of the thegnly or ecclesiastical chief tenants or their representatives is hard to say on present evidence. Both are possible. Building C2B at the Clarendon Hotel lies just behind the 'trade' zone, and can readily be seen as a tradesman's or a merchant's house. Cellar 3160 at 113–119 High St is perhaps similar, and was set well back from the street, as was the cellar at All Saints Church. In contrast, Building B1 at 55–58 Cornmarket, one of the largest cellars in Oxford, was constructed only a few metres back from the Cornmarket frontage; perhaps this suggests that there was still considerable variation in building patterns at this time, or perhaps this was not a private building, but a warehouse or even a building with some form of 'public' function to which general access was needed.

True cellar-pits at Oxford seem to be a phenomenon of the first half of the 11th century, although most are datable only by the pottery in their backfills, which generally shows the dominance of St Neot's ware over earlier (Late Saxon Oxford ware) and later (Cotswold-type ware) traditions. The limited evidence for 10th-century buildings in the town suggests that these were predominantly of familiar rural forms, comprising post-built structures and buildings with cob or post-and-mud walls. The carpenters and labourers who constructed the first buildings and enclosures in the town in the 10th century can have had little or no experience of urban building forms, and probably imported the traditions and techniques with which they must have

been familiar in the countryside. The cellar-pits are, however, a widely recognised type of building that was current in Viking Age and late Saxon towns such as York, Chester, Thetford, London and Wallingford. They perhaps represent the first sign of building types that were specifically intended for urban and commercial needs, although the 'sunken huts' recorded at Oxford Castle and at 55–58 Cornmarket St (Gaz Nos 75 and 35) may be early attempts at creating underground storage. Such evidence as is currently available at Oxford suggests that the cellars are associated with the development of commercial plots in the town centre, and they did not appear on the secondary frontage at Church St, where the controlled excavation of the greater part of two medieval tenements showed that there were no buildings at all in this period.

Churches (Fig. 2.4)

The real age of most of Oxford's medieval churches is unknown, and the evidence for the churches of late Saxon Oxford derives largely from documentary records. Three late Saxon charters confirm the presence of St Frideswide's by 1002 (*CSF*, i, No. 2), St Ebbe's before 1005 (*Eynsham Cartulary*, p. viii, 36), and St Martin's before 1032 (*Chron. Abingdon*, i, 439–42). Domesday Book confirms the presence of St Michael at the Northgate, St Mary the Virgin and St Peter in the East by 1086. Archaeological evidence has shown that burial was taking place at St Aldate's Church in the 9th or 10th century (see above), but there is no evidence yet known for a church of the same date. St Michael at the Northgate has a surviving tower datable to the period 1010–1060 (see above, and Chapter 4, below), and it is assumed that this was associated with a contemporary church. Conversely, archaeological evidence suggests that All Saints Church was probably a post-Conquest foundation (see below). The standing tower of St George in the Castle is datable architecturally to the 11th century, although it remains a matter of debate whether it is a pre- or post-Conquest structure; the collegiate church of St George was itself a Norman foundation, although the tower could have belonged to an earlier church on the same site. There is no reason to assume that all the *burh*'s gates would have had gate churches, although St George's Tower may have been associated with a late Saxon Westgate later subsumed within the castle precinct. Elsewhere, excavations carried out by Sturdy at St Peter in the East in 1968 are reported as having found evidence of a late Saxon stone church overlying a 10th-century timber church, which in turn overlay earlier domestic occupation (Gaz No. 124), although no further evidence is known in support of this. St Peter's was clearly an exceptional church in late Saxon Oxford; it is recorded in Domesday Book as holding suburban land in Holywell, with a large extra-mural parish including the chapelries of Wolvercote and St Cross (*VCH*, i, 413, 415; iv 398). However, it remains poorly understood. Its position in the east of the town, its

apostolic dedication, and its association with a large extra-mural parish might suggest that it was originally a minster of equivalent status to St Frideswide's. Multiple minsters were a feature of Mercian *burhs*, and the suggestion that Oxford originated in this way in the mid Saxon period has been discussed above. Until more evidence is available about this remarkable site, however, this can only remain conjecture. The churches of St Ebbe's, St Martin's and St Mary the Virgin were clearly in origin private churches that later acquired parochial status (see discussion of the earliest occupation of the *burh*, above).

Suburbs

The rapid expansion of the town in the late Saxon period is suggested by the relatively early evidence for occupation in outlying parts of the town, or in true suburbs. The south suburb along the Thames crossing is perhaps a special case, and there was clearly occupation at points along the line of the crossing from as early as the 10th century. The evidence is considered in more detail above. On the north side of the town there is no evidence to date for any settlement prior to the 12th century.

The question of suburbs on the west and east of the town is complicated by the uncertainties regarding the original line of the burghal defences, which have been considered above. There is clear evidence for settlement both east and west of the proposed primary defences by the early 11th century, if not before, although the interpretation of this as suburban or urban remains uncertain. On the west side, two excavations at the site of Oxford Castle have demonstrated the existence of late Saxon settlement in the area prior to the construction of d'Oilly's motte and bailey in 1071 (Gaz Nos 74 and 75). Both found evidence for houses of sunken hut type, and the depth of occupation deposits suggested that there may have been a built-up street running east-west across the area, arguably the original line of Queen St/Castle St before its diversion. Opportunities for excavation in the eastern part of the medieval walled town have been very few owing to the presence of many colleges and university buildings. The most certain excavated evidence for late Saxon occupation in this area comes from Logic Lane (Gaz No. 63, and see above), where pits and a possible boundary line of the first half of the 11th century were seen. Jope suggested that the remains found at the University Examination Schools (Gaz No. 58) close to the Eastgate probably represented cellar-pits of the type seen at the Clarendon Hotel, and if this is true it would imply that the east-west axis of the town had been extensively built-up by the first half of the 11th century. On the north side of the High Street, a recent evaluation in the Provost's Garden at Queen's College revealed a roughly constructed gravel surface, probably a yard, and an associated pit with metalworking slag, which were dated to the 10th century (Gaz No. 119). A single posthole was dated

to the late Saxon period. Nearby stood the church of St Peter in the East, referred to above, where Sturdy reported evidence of late 10th- and 11th-century churches beneath the surviving 12th-century building, overlying domestic occupation presumed to date to the early 10th century. This too would imply an extensive early spread of occupation towards the eastern edge of the town.

Outside the Eastgate of the town lay the suburban manor of Holywell, occupied by the 11th century when Domesday Book records 23 'men with little gardens' living there. John Blair and Barbara Crawford have recently discussed the evidence for a further suburban settlement in this area, on the east side of the Cherwell, in the medieval parish and village of St Clement's (Blair and Crawford 1997). The settlement is recorded as the *brycg-gesett* in the 13th century, and the suburban church of St Clement in this area was in existence by the 1120s. St Clement is a dedication associated widely with bridges and with Scandinavian contexts, and it is possible that there was a Danish settlement, perhaps even a Cnut-period garrison, in this area (*ibid.*, 142).

Crafts, industries and trade

Evidence for the crafts and industries of the late Saxon town comes largely from the fills of pits, and especially cellar-pits, and from the dumping of waste into the Thames channels along the line of the crossing. There is very little primary evidence that can be unequivocally linked with the use of buildings and features, but the town seems to have been quite intensively occupied by the early 11th century, and it is perhaps unlikely that the rubbish in the fills of pits and disused cellars could have been moved very far from its point of origin. In general, knives and utilitarian personal items such as combs, plain buckles and bone skates have not been considered in the summary that follows here, since their occurrence in the characteristic very small numbers on any site is more likely to relate to private use than to manufacturing. In general the evidence for trades and crafts is surprisingly limited, although a number of sites in the High Street and Cornmarket seem to have been involved in metalworking, and there is evidence of butchery, leatherworking, hornworking and cloth production elsewhere. Oxford was a mint in the late Saxon period, but no certain evidence of this has been found archaeologically. At many Oxford sites, the typical pattern is for a small quantity but relatively wide range of implements, which is essentially suggestive of small-scale domestic production of a variety of goods, including woollen cloth and rudimentary bone implements. Some sites also show evidence for what were perhaps more commercial crafts such as leatherworking and metalworking, although even here there is often a mix apparent. The contrast with the evidence from the 12th century onwards (see below) is very striking, when manufacturing sites are clearly visible in the archaeological

record (as at Church St) from the large quantities of craft debris. Could this imply that much production in the late Saxon town was still domestic in scale, with households undertaking a mix or range of productive activities rather than specialising in a single trade?

The earliest evidence comes from the Thames crossing sites (see above, and Chapters 3 and 7 below). Flax retting was being carried out in wattle-lined gullies and in channels in this area from the mid Saxon period onwards, and this implies the manufacture of linen cloth. The presence of a puparium of sheep ked (*Melophagus ovinus*) in silt from one of the flax retting gullies at 89–91 St Aldate's hints that sheep were being washed, or wool in some way processed, in the vicinity (Robinson, Chapter 7, below). The waterlogged conditions at some of the crossing sites also preserved considerable quantities of leather. Shoes, straps and a cutting scrap were found in probable 9th-century silts at 79–80 St Aldate's; there were more shoes in 10th-century silts at 89–91 St Aldate's, and large quantities of manufacturing offcuts occurred in the mid to late 10th-century silts at 56–60 St Aldate's. An iron awl and slicker (both leatherworking tools) occurred on the 11th- to 12th-century bankside at 89–91 St Aldate's, although both finds were associated with make-up layers and could therefore have been brought from elsewhere. Leatherworking remained an important industry in Oxford throughout the medieval period; cordwainers (shoemakers/leatherworkers) and tanners are recorded frequently in documentary records of the 12th and 13th centuries, and some of them were important men in the town (*VCH* iv, 35–6). A guild of corviners had been established at Oxford by 1130.

Findings associated with floors in the two 10th-century buildings at 79–80 St Aldate's provide some evidence for craft working on the site itself at this time; these objects included a cut antler tine and a bone toggle from the earlier building, and two bone needles, a bone spindlewhorl and an iron awl and heckle tooth from floors of the later building.

A collar from a tool, an iron knife and a fragment of lead waste from which small chips had been cut with a knife were found in the earliest ashy layers at All Saints Church, and could be datable to the first half of the 10th century. A number of finds associated with cloth working were found in late 10th- and 11th-century levels on the site. These are remarkably consistent, but need not imply anything more than domestic production. A roughout for a bone threadpicker, a glass linen smother and a spindlewhorl of chalk or limestone were found in later 10th- to early 11th-century levels. A broken polished antler pin was found on the floor of the early to mid 11th-century cellar, and a bone needle and spindlewhorl were found in the mid 11th-century backfill of the cellar pit on the site, associated with utilitarian ironwork including four knives and two horseshoes. On the opposite side of the High Street, at Nos 113–119, considerable evidence for

nearby ironworking was recovered from the infill of the very large cellar at the rear of No. 116. Material recovered here included fragments of smithing hearth bases and linings, and considerable quantities of iron slag, ash, charcoal and burnt clay. The absence of hammerscale and microslags suggested that the material had been dumped from nearby rather than that ironworking was carried out on the site itself. There was also some evidence for copper-alloy working in the vicinity, but the fact that only one possible fragment of mould or crucible, and only one fragment of possible crucible slag were found again suggested that the material had been dumped from somewhere nearby rather than that it was worked on the site itself. It is interesting to note that crucible fragments suggestive of copper-alloy working were recovered at the Examination Schools (Gaz No. 58), much further to the east along the High Street. Jope lists other crucible fragments from Radcliffe Square, 18–20 Cornmarket, St Michael's Church (1906) and Oxford Castle (1952/3, 105–6). The cellar pit fills at 113–119 High Street suggest the possibility of butchery in the vicinity, with cattle butchery waste (including skulls, ankle and foot bones) present in much higher quantities in the late Saxon period than in comparable deposits of later medieval date. This contrasts with the evidence from All Saints Church on the opposite side of the road, where Wilson suggests that the animal bones from the cellar pit fill suggested domestic refuse rather than commercial butchery.

Very little evidence for craft working was recovered from the late Saxon phases of the Queen St sites, but the presence of a mid to late Saxon type pivoting knife in a pit at 33–35 Queen Street is of interest, since this knife is of a type used for craft working (Fig. 6.18 No. 31). A lead lump and copper alloy casting debris from the possible cellar pit at 4 Queen St cannot certainly be taken as evidence of metalworking here in the 11th century because of the presence of intrusive post-medieval material in the same context. Much clearer evidence for substantial metalworking was recovered nearby at 7–8 Queen St, but is probably of post-Conquest date. At the west end of Queen St (Nos 23–26) the only evidence of craft working came in the form of two clay loomweights from the fill of a 10th-century pit.

At 55–58 Cornmarket, splashes of molten lead were identified in the upper fills of the very large cellar, B1; the only other find indicative of craft working was a single spindlewhorl from a mid 11th-century layer. More evidence was recovered from the Clarendon Hotel site. The most notable find was a stone mould for casting silver ingots, which came from the bottom of late Saxon well C2C; since this well was backfilled in the late 11th century, however, it is possible that the casting of silver was in fact taking place on site in the post-Conquest period. The mould was of fine-grained oolitic limestone, and remains of silver with a little lead were traceable spectrographically in the hollow. It had been broken from a larger mould, and the ingots would have

been 99 mm long when molten, with rounded ends. Jope comments (Jope and Pantin 1958, 72) that such ingots are well known among Viking Age hoards. Small fragments of crucibles with slag from copper-alloy working were recovered from the lower fills of late Saxon cellar-pit B1A, and small amounts of slag and corroded copper-alloy were recovered from mid 11th-century fills of well B1B. Textile working on the site was attested by finds of spindlewhorls and loomweights, and a polished bone threadpicker. At the north end of the street, the fill of the small cellar-pit 36 at 44–46 Cornmarket contained four sawn cattle horn cores, which testify to bone working. The horn tips had been removed in three cases, and may have been used to make horn tips for bows (Hassall 1971a, 30–31). Sawing and cutting marks around the base of the horns suggest that the horn coverings may have been cut off for use as cups, or for the manufacture of small objects. The pit also contained a comparatively rare example of an iron bowl or dipper, with a flanged rim and handle (*ibid.*, fig. 6 no. 4); a tang to attach a wooden handle was found nearby and appeared to belong to the dipper. Pit 35 on the north side of the same site contained a bone pin beater and a single piece of iron slag.

At Church Street an 11th-century oven containing a layer of ash was one of the very few possible craft-related structures known from late Saxon Oxford, but there was no evidence to show what processes had been carried out there. An interesting collection of objects was recovered from the three late Saxon pits at Logic Lane. These included a decorated bone implement, two knives, about 25 nails, small iron clamps for joining planks of wood, a large hook and fragments of what appeared to be a small trowel. Fragments of iron slag were also found.

Pottery and stone finds give indications of trading contacts, both regionally and further afield. The pottery used in Oxford in the late Saxon period was not made in the town, and Maureen Mellor has identified four principal ceramic traditions that appear to have differing distributions within the county, and different sources (1994; see also this volume, Chapter 6 below). Three of these are probably of fairly local manufacture. The earliest local tradition comprises coarse handmade shelly wares (principally Late Saxon Oxford Ware, Fabric B), which represents 80–90 per cent of Oxford pottery during the 9th and 10th centuries (Mellor 1994, 40). Mellor suggests that this pottery was probably made close to Oxford, and notes that its Oxfordshire distribution is largely along the Thames, which may reflect river-borne trade (*ibid.*). A source slightly to the west and upstream of Oxford would be supported by geology and by the evidence of the distribution of this ware in the county (*ibid.*, 37). The second local tradition, early Medieval Oxford Ware (Fabric AC), is a handmade calcareous gravel tempered tradition that was established in Oxford by the time of the building of Oxford Castle *c* 1071, and probably by the middle of the 11th century. Mellor suggests that there may have been very little hiatus

between the disappearance of Late Saxon Oxford Ware in the early 11th century, and the arrival of early Medieval Oxford Ware (Chapter 6, below). Early Medieval Oxford Ware was in use in Oxford in the 12th century, but had probably been superseded by the late 12th century (Mellor 1994, 71). It has a distribution towards the north and west of Oxford, and may be associated with the only potters mentioned by Domesday Book in the county, who were located at Bladon, some six miles north-west of Oxford (Mellor, Chapter 6, below). The distribution of this pottery suggests that it was traded overland (Mellor 1994, 50). The third local tradition, Late Saxon-Medieval Oxford Ware (Fabric Y), used a sandy fabric with quartz tempering and its earlier products were handmade. Its appearance in Oxford is probably datable to the late 11th century, and it was in decline by the mid 13th century (*ibid.*, 71). The source of this pottery probably lay north of Oxford, possibly in the vicinity of Deddington and Middleton Stoney, although it is possible that there was another production site east of the Cherwell, perhaps close to the later Brill/Boarstall ceramic industries (*ibid.*, 68, 71).

During the late Saxon period a substantial proportion of the pottery used in Oxford was of the technologically superior wheel-thrown St Neot's type ware (Fabric R); Mellor argues that it is unlikely that this was manufactured locally, and it was probably imported from the East Midlands (1994, 55). St Neot's type ware first appears in Oxford in the early 10th century, although it seems to have reached its peak in the early 11th century. It was in decline by the 1040s, at which point it represented some 50 per cent of the total assemblage (*ibid.*, 57). Mellor has noted that pottery in pit groups of the late 10th century in Oxford tends to show a marked dominance of either Late Saxon Oxford Ware or St Neot's type ware, with the pit groups of St Neot's type ware tending to occur in comparatively remote parts of the town, possibly in suburbs, as at Logic Lane, Oxford Castle and Church St. By the early 11th century, St Neot's type ware is found in much greater quantities in the town centre, along the main axial streets. She suggests that this may be due to the presence of Danes in the town, who retained cultural links with the Danelaw and a preference for the distinctive vessel range of their own pottery, perhaps because of different culinary practices. At first such people may have been living in suburbs or less favoured areas of the town, but following the Danish conquest of England and the accession of Cnut in 1016 there may have been greater stability in relations between the Saxon and Danish communities in the town, allowing the Danes to move into the town centre (see Chapter 6 below for a full account of this argument).

Small quantities of pottery imported from the continent are present in Oxford assemblages from the 9th century onwards. Mellor suggests (Chapter 6, below) that the vessels themselves may not have been traded, but arrived in Oxford as personal

possessions, or as containers for traded goods. She notes that the range of imports at All Saints Church was exceptional for the town, and seems more typical of a mercantile quarter than of a particularly rich household. Table 6.7 shows the range of continental imported pottery found in the town, which includes imports from France, including the Pas de Calais, from Belgium and from the Rhineland.

The stone used for the construction of the surviving 11th-century tower of St Michael at the Northgate provides a valuable insight into quarrying at this time, and a report by Philip Powell can be found in Chapter 6 of the present volume (below). Powell comments that all the stone used in the original fabric is from Oxfordshire. The walls are of Coral Rag or other Corallian rocks from the hills around the town itself, while the details are of Taynton or Burford stone, from the vicinity of the town of Burford, which lies on the edge of the Cotswolds some 25 km west of Oxford.

Stone objects indicate a mixture of local and distant sources. Fragments of quern and possible millstone of Niedermendig lava imported from the Rhineland were present in late Saxon levels at the Clarendon Hotel, at Oxford Castle, and at 23–26 Queen St. A quern fragment of possible Millstone Grit from central or northern England was found at 79–80 St Aldate's in a 10th-century context, and a rotary quern of Old Red Sandstone was found in a 10th-century layer at 7 Queen St. Whetstones of Eidsborg schist, imported from Norway, are known from late Saxon levels at the Clarendon Hotel, 113–119 High Street and 23–26 Queen St. Whetstones of sandstones were found at Oxford Castle, and a whetstone of possible Purbeck or Jurassic Oolite from the north-east Midlands/Yorkshire area was found in 10th-century levels at 79–80 St Aldate's. Roe notes the presence of a possible grindstone fragment from the fill of cellar-pit 3160 at 113–119 High Street; this find is of great interest since it is generally accepted that grindstone and crank technology was imported to England from Scandinavia (2000, 425).

Diet, natural resources and the environment

The animal bone assemblages from sites reported in the present volume are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 (below), where Wilson also considers the possibility of mapping town refuse to determine what the bone distribution indicates about the spread of human activity in late Saxon and medieval Oxford. With rare exceptions (notably Church St, Gaz No. 24) the animal bone assemblages for the late Saxon period are comparatively small. The contrast between the late Saxon period and the Norman period is particularly striking at the Thames crossing sites, where the 12th-century assemblages are double the size of the late Saxon groups, and the 13th-century assemblages are nearly four times larger. The 12th- and 13th-century groups clearly reflect the permanent occupation of tenements on the site, but given the rapid expansion of Oxford in

the late Saxon period, it is notable that there is not more evidence of associated food debris. This raises the interesting question of whether the small assemblages genuinely reflect a fairly low level of meat consumption (and therefore, presumably, occupation) in the early years of the *burgh*, or whether the areas available for excavation have in general been too small to reveal substantial groups of domestic, butchery and craft debris of this time. This is a question that would repay further research in the future. The comments that follow here are derived from recent studies of the more significant assemblages from the town: 2235 identifiable fragments from 10th- and 11th-century pits at Church St (Wilson 1989a); 970 mammalian bones and 181 bird bones and shells from the late Saxon levels at All Saints Church (Wilson, this volume Chapter 7, below); 567 mammalian bones from mid and late Saxon levels along the Thames crossing (Armour-Chelu, this volume Chapter 7, below); 847 fragments from 10th- and 11th-century levels at 113–119 High Street (Maltby 2000); groups from late Saxon levels at 11–18 Queen St (Wilson 1983); 515 mammal and bird bones from late Saxon levels at 7–8 Queen St (Wilson, this volume, below); 855 identifiable large mammal bones, and 609 small mammal, bird and fish bones from Lincoln College (Charles 2002; Ingrem 2002). A number of other excavations have also produced useful groups of material: 439 identifiable bones of mammals and birds from three 11th-century pits at Logic Lane (Banks 1961/2); groups from late Saxon cellar-pits at the Clarendon Hotel (M Jope 1958); 252 identifiable fragments from 44–46 Cornmarket St, of which 134 came from the fill of late Saxon cellar-pit 36 (Marples 1971); 643 fragments of mammalian and bird bones and oyster shells from Oxford Castle (Marples 1976); and 814 fragments of mammalian bones from 79–80 St Aldate's (Marples 1977).

All late Saxon assemblages reflect the predominance in the meat diet of the three main domesticates, cattle, sheep and pig. Animal bone dumped in the river channels between the mid 10th century and the mid 11th century included a significant element of butchers' waste (Armour-Chelu, Chapter 7, below), comprising cattle, sheep and pig skull fragments; several skulls had been cleaved to allow the extraction of the brain for consumption. Some table waste from meat-bearing joints of cattle was also present. The high percentage of cattle fragments in the cellar fills at 113–119 High Street is also likely to have been butchers' waste, and suggests that commercial butchery may have been taking place nearby. Elsewhere, the animal bone at All Saints Church, Lincoln College, Church St and 11–18 Queen St is likely to be domestic debris. It is thus difficult to assess the relative contribution of cattle and sheep to the late Saxon diet, since cattle bone, because of its greater size, tends to be better represented in assemblages of butchers' waste.

Wilson comments (1983, 69) that beef and mutton were probably purchased, because of limits to

pasturage. However, there is good evidence that some birds and animals were being reared in the town. At 11–18 Queen St there was an exceptional quantity of pig bone (35–46% of 10th- to 11th-century bones) and of domestic or feral pigeon, suggesting that the pigs and pigeons could have been reared on site. A noticeable abundance of pig bone at All Saints Church also suggested that pigs may have been reared on site. Both sites had a high proportion of domestic fowl to goose bones, and Wilson suggests this probably shows the rearing of domestic fowl in the backyards in the town centre sites. Domestic geese and ducks present in relatively small numbers may have been reared on the low-lying floodplain meadows surrounding the town. Abundant eggshell (reported as probably chicken) was present in the fill of the early to mid 11th-century cellar-pit A1B at the Clarendon Hotel, and heavy staining of gravel underlying the yard surface of a 10th-century building at 79–80 St Aldate's suggested that animals were being kept there. There was clearly variety in the late Saxon diet, and hunting and fowling probably made a small contribution, from the evidence of red and roe deer bones, hare and wild birds, including golden plover, woodcock and barnacle goose from All Saints Church, golden plover from Lincoln College, a partridge bone from 7–8 Queen St, and teal, bittern, snipe and lapwing from 11–18 Queen St. Plover are wild fowl that inhabit moors, farmland, estuaries and muddy seashores, and the presence of their remains indicates that the inhabitants were either hunting locally available food sources, or purchasing luxury food (Ingrem 2002). Small passerines at Lincoln College could have been eaten; small birds were considered exotic in the medieval period, when they were served at feasts (*ibid.*). Of particular note was the metatarsal of a peregrine falcon from 56–60 St Aldate's, presumably a hunting bird. Eel and herring were present at 113–119 High St, together with other bones of unidentified fish; bones of pike and cod were recorded at 11–18 Queen St, and oysters were relatively abundant in the cellar-pit fills at All Saints Church. Herring and eel dominated the fish assemblages from the 11th-century occupation at Lincoln College, with flatfish, cod, salmonid, pike and chub also present, representing both marine and freshwater species. There was also evidence from 79–80 St Aldate's for the late Saxon importation of marine fish, oyster and mussels.

The variety and quality of the late Saxon diet at 11–18 Queen St and Church St was probably better than the diet and level of subsistence in the later medieval period. Whether this represents decline in the status of specific tenements or areas of the town, or whether it is a more general phenomenon, cannot be determined on present evidence. It appears, however, that a greater proportion of young cattle and sheep were consumed in the late Saxon period than later. Armour-Chelu comments that the pattern of common domesticates from the Thames crossing suggests that veal and good quality mutton were

sold in the late Saxon period, perhaps indicating the presence of a luxury market. Evidence from later medieval levels shows that poor quality beef and mutton was being sold as well, from elderly cattle and sheep probably culled from local farms after they had reached the end of their useful life. The changing patterns of consumption and supply in medieval towns are a complex phenomenon, and likely to reflect change in agricultural practice as much as change in towns, but Wilson has suggested a possible connection between the moderate level of prosperity evident in the 10th- and 11th-century diet at 11–18 Queen St and factors such as larger landholdings in the town at the time, and the keeping of animals on the site (1983, 69). Although it can be no more than speculation at present, there may be a reflection in these late Saxon animal bone groups of a more rural lifestyle in the town in the late Saxon period than later, with larger landholdings offering more opportunity for the rearing of birds and animals for domestic consumption. The bone evidence for a luxury market for high quality meat in the late Saxon period is also of considerable interest. It is clear from historical sources that Oxford was a place of considerable importance by the early 11th century; it is likely that there was a royal residence (one of Edward the Elder's sons died in Oxford in 924, as did Harold Harefoot in 1040), and numerous royal councils were held in the town in 1015, 1018, 1035 and 1065, attracting the leading magnates of the land, both English and Danish (VCH iv, 9–10).

Other species present at 113–119 High Street included badger and raven. The raven, and a juvenile rook or crow at All Saints Church, were probably scavengers. Horse, fox, cat and dog bones at these sites presumably derive from pets, working animals and urban scavengers, although cats, foxes and possibly badgers and hares were skinned for fur, and characteristic skinning marks have been found on late Saxon cat and fox bones from Church St and from 11–18 Queen St.

Environmental samples from the late Saxon period provide evidence for crops, diet and domestic activity. Samples from the wattle-lined flax retting gullies cut into the bankside at 89–91 St Aldate's contained elements of human sewage comprising cereal bran and corncockle seeds, blackberry pips, apple core fragments, plum or damson stones and summer savory. Robinson (Chapter 7, below) comments that this probably represents discharge into the gully from a latrine on higher ground. Small quantities of charred grain and chaff from free-threshing wheat and rye were present in the samples, together with a bean beetle (*Bruchus rufimanus*), which probably came from a field or broad bean. Large samples of threshed and fully cleaned free-threshing wheat and barley were recovered from 10th-century levels at All Saints Church (Robinson, Chapter 7 below) and at Lincoln College (Pelling 2002), and may represent the remains from granaries or bakeries. A sample of charred plant remains from

the floor of the second ground-level building at 113–119 High Street (Robinson 2000) suggests a range of domestic activity, including the parching of wheat grain to harden it for grinding, the malting of drage (mixed barley and oats), and the burning of straw and hay from old thatch or bedding, perhaps as fuel for a bread oven. Charred plant assemblages contemporary with the early and later 11th-century occupation at Lincoln College included mixed cereal processing waste (principally wheat and barley, but with oats and rye also present), together with broad bean, pea, possible fodder vetch, hazel nuts, possible cherry, sloes, blackberry/raspberry and apple/pear. There was also evidence for hay, probably derived from the floodplain grassland for flooring or animal bedding and feed (Pelling 2002). Charcoal remains suggest that oak was the principal building timber used on the site, but other wood species present in smaller quantities comprised beech, hazel, *Prunus* sp. (cherry/blackthorn), Maloidiae (apple/pear/hawthorn) and ash (Challinor 2002). All could have been used in furniture and fittings, but hazel, in particular, would have been an appropriate timber for wattles in wattle and daub construction as it is easily coppiced to produce fine, straight poles (ibid.). Wood used for the construction of the mid 10th-century building at 89–91 St Aldate's (see Hillam and Miles, Chapter 7 below) consisted of large oak timbers cut from relatively long-lived trees; in two cases the trees were likely to have been well over 300 years old when felled. The timber was of good quality, being straight-grained and free from knots. The timbers seem to have originated from different woodlands, and there is reason to believe that the same woodlands were exploited to produce timbers for London and Winchester. Hillam and Miles suggest that the lack of uniformity between these timbers suggests they may have been brought from a timber yard.

NORMAN OXFORD: THE AFTERMATH OF THE CONQUEST IN THE LATER 11TH CENTURY (FIG. 2.9)

The castle and the defences

Oxford was not directly involved in any of the military campaigns of the Norman Conquest (VCH iv, 10), but its effects can be seen in the archaeology of the town, sometimes very plainly but sometimes perhaps more indirectly. The most striking new feature of this period is the relatively little-known Oxford Castle. The Annals of Oseney Abbey state that Oxford Castle was built by Robert d'Oilly in 1071, 'MLXXI. Eodem anno aedificatum est castellum Oxonfordense a Roberto de Oilly primo' (Ann. Mon., iv (Rolls Ser. 1869), 9). It was constructed on the west edge of the late Saxon town, over areas of late Saxon occupation (see above). The dating suggests that occupied houses here were destroyed for the building of the castle, although this fact is not mentioned in Domesday Book (unlike at Wallingford, for example). Relatively little archaeological work has



Figure 2.9 Early 12th-century Oxford.

been possible at the castle, as until very recently the site was largely occupied by Oxford prison. A survey of the surviving castle structures was undertaken by the RCHM (1939, 157–8); Jope carried out a small research excavation in 1952 (Gaz No. 74) and a series of excavations were carried out by Hassall between 1965 and 1973 in advance of construction works and the realignment of Castle St (Gaz No. 75).

Three structures survive from d'Oilly's castle. The motte itself (Plate 2.6) is steep, approximately 65 m in diameter at its base, and 23 m at the top, and it stands to a height of 18 m, although the top 6 m or so may be the result of a 13th-century heightening for

the creation of a well chamber (measurements taken from the Scheduled Monument Description; English Heritage, Monument No. 21701, 1993). The material used for the construction of the motte is indicated by the results of a number of boreholes sunk in 1965 and illustrated by Hassall (1976, fig. 3); one of these was sunk from the top to the bottom of the mound and suggests that it was principally composed of brown medium to coarse sand and fine gravel, similar to the natural gravel at this point; this was presumably upcast from the digging of the moat. The moat was lined with blue clay to consolidate the sides and prevent seepage of water, and the clay was



Plate 2.6 Oxford castle motte. Photo Mike Hallam.

carried up a short distance as a capping for the mound, to consolidate the loose gravel and prevent slippage. The moat ran directly around the base of the motte, apparently with no berm intervening (Jope 1952/3 81–3 and fig. 31; Hassall 1976 243 and fig. 3). It is assumed that there would originally have been a timber tower on top of the motte, but no trace of this is known. Stone towers appear to have been built on the motte subsequently, but are known only from a description made during the rebuilding of the prison in the 1790s when structures on top of the mound were briefly uncovered, and from old views of the castle. Two stone structures are implied; a decagonal shell keep roughly 17.6 m (58 ft) in diameter, with walls roughly 1.5 m thick, surrounding an inner structure of the same form, roughly 6.7 m (22 ft) in diameter, with walls just under 1 m (3 ft) thick (RCHM 1939, 156). The date of these structures is unknown. The mound was located at the extreme west edge of the gravel terrace, above the floodplain but at a point where the gravel is sloping down to the river. Hassall's borehole evidence shows that the moat was dug through the gravel down to the level of the Oxford Clay; this choice of location presumably made the construction of a water-filled moat both feasible and much easier than it would have been higher up on the gravels. Proximity to the river is likely to have been a major factor; the water supply to the castle, being upstream of the town, was probably comparatively unimpeded by mills, fisheries and other forms of human interference, and probably also relatively clean. An ample supply of water could be run off directly into the moat, and used to power the castle mill.

The moat and outer defences of the castle no longer survive above ground, but the outline of the castle bailey has been established from the evidence of early maps and topographical studies, and from Hassall's excavations. Inside the moat was an earth

rampart (the bailey bank), and a stone curtain wall with towers and drawbridges was built along the top of the rampart. The full circuit of the curtain wall with towers is shown on Agas' map of Oxford of 1578 (Fig. 4.2), but it is not known at what point this was constructed. The ramparts were presumably d'Oilly's work; later external earthworks (shown by Agas, Fig. 4.2) may have been added by Stephen during the Anarchy, and limited and very short-lived fortifications may have been added during the Civil War in 1649–52 (Wood, *City*, i, 276). What survived of the ramparts was demolished in 1769–70 for the building of New Road, and the spoil was used for the final levelling-off of the moat. The motte itself very nearly suffered the same fate, but the owners of the site, the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church, demurred and 'considered the Hill as an Ornament to that district, and as a venerable Monument of Antiquity - And that the Commissioners might not be disappointed of the Materials of which the Hill was composed, they agreed to give them the free use of what should be found in the Eastern Rampart in order to form and complete the road then making' (Christ Church, MS Estates 77/400, quoted in Munby and Walton 1990).

The two other surviving structures relate to the chapel of St George in the Castle, which stood on the south-west edge of the bailey, south of the motte. St George's tower (Plate 2.7) is of massive build, roughly square in plan, measuring approximately 6 × 5 m (19.5 × 17 ft) at its base, where the walls are roughly 2.7 m (9 ft) thick. It is constructed of coursed rubble with rubble quoins, with a diagonal staircase turret at the south-east angle; a series of offsets give the appearance of a pronounced batter (RCHM 1939, 158). There are four storeys internally. Most of the few surviving openings appear to be later insertions or restorations, although a series of larger, blocked roundheaded openings are visible towards the top of



Plate 2.7 *St George's Tower, from the south-west.*

the tower. A roundheaded arch at ground floor level in the east wall presumably opened into the chapel beyond, although the RCHM surveyors considered the arch in its present form to be a comparatively modern restoration. The chapel is now represented only by the crypt, which was taken down and reconstructed in 1794, probably in a slightly different position. The vaulting and rubble side walls were

thought by the RCHM surveyors to date from 1794 (1939, 158), although the columns and responds are probably original. Both the tower and the crypt can be associated with the foundation of the collegiate church of St George in 1074 by Robert d'Oilly and Roger d'Ivri (*VCH* ii, 160–1; *VCH* iv, 381). The tower is said to have served as the belltower of this church, but may pre-date it; Cooper (1976) has suggested

that d'Oilly and d'Ivri may have refounded an earlier church on the site for their college, and Renn (1994, 179–81) has suggested that the tower may be pre-Conquest, and have served as a gate tower in the late Saxon town.

Jope and Hassall's excavations beneath the mound and the bailey bank found evidence for a built-up street frontage here in the late Saxon town, along a road that ran across the site of the castle; Hassall suggested that this street would have continued the line of modern Queen St as far as Quaking Bridge (1976, 242). The building of the castle cut this street off, and the route was presumably diverted south-westwards around the outside of the moat, possibly to a new Westgate on the site of the known later medieval gate. St Budoc's church stood outside the east gate of the castle, and is first recorded in 1166. A hint of the effect of these changes in the late 11th century comes from the evidence for encroachment on the streets. After apparently 150 years of regular maintenance, the surfaces of Castle St and Church St were being cut by pits in the late 11th century. Hassall suggests this may be a sign of how far the late Saxon street system in the area had been disrupted, and possibly even of a breakdown in the organisation of the town itself (Hassall *et al.* 1989, 123, 125, 129). Further major disruption of this area took place in 1216, when the eastern barbican of the castle was built. St Budoc's was demolished and relocated outside the Westgate, and in order to avoid the barbican the westwards route out of the town would have followed an almost direct north-south road from Castle St to Church St; there were tenements on its eastern frontage (Hassall 1976, 245).

There is no evidence to suggest that d'Oilly or any of his Norman successors made any other substantial change to the town's defences, and it was not until the early 13th century that the partly surviving bastioned stone circuit was constructed. The castle itself was the principal defended site at Oxford both during the later 11th century and during the Anarchy of 1135–54, and was undoubtedly the Normans' priority. It was fortified for the Empress Matilda in 1138, and Robert d'Oilly II declared for her in 1140. In late 1142 Matilda was besieged at the castle by Stephen for three months before escaping to Wallingford. Earth mounds that formerly stood outside the castle moat to the north are thought to be siege works dating from this period. Subsequently Oxford remained in Stephen's hands and served as a centre for numerous operations of the civil war, and the agreement between Stephen and the future Henry II that ended the war was concluded at Oxford in 1154 (*VCH* iv, 11). The castle was maintained, with numerous repairs being undertaken, until at least the 14th century; although it was not a royal residence in normal times, it must have remained a significant element in town life throughout the 12th century. Elsewhere the evidence is piecemeal and minor, but suggests that encroachments on the town defences were being tolerated. The levelling of the rampart at St Michael's Church-

yard (Gaz No. 29, discussed above), and the extension of the church's graveyard across the old line of the defences, are probably datable to the Norman period. The very large ditch seen north of the 13th-century wall in George St (Gaz No. 47, discussed above) was of uncertain date, but may have been Norman work to connect the town ditch to the castle moat. On the south of the town, Henry I's grant to St Frideswide's priory in 1122 gave them permission to close up an intramural road in the area, and to enclose or block all gates of the whole Priory (CSF i, No. 6). In 1136 × 40 the canons received confirmation of their right to their gate in the town wall within their enclosure, and to construct buildings over the wall as long as they kept those parts of it in repair (CSF i, No. 12). The King's Houses, or the royal palace of Beaumont (see below) was constructed outside the walls of the town by 1132, which could simply reflect a lack of suitable building space in the town; nevertheless it also reinforces the impression that the new Norman rulers of Oxford perceived the old Saxon defences as of little relevance for their own needs.

Oxford in Domesday Book by Julian Munby

The entry for Oxford in Domesday Book is both revealing and puzzling, since as with all the borough entries in Domesday it is not always clear what evidence was being collected or for what purpose, and there is much less consistency between the individual Domesday circuits for their handling of towns than there was on the treatment of information about rural manors. Oxford occupies most of a page at the head of the county, and is one of the more detailed borough entries in Domesday, while its complexities deserve discussion in some detail.

The record is essentially one of property holding, but the difficulty is that there are three distinct statements about the houses of the King, the magnates, and the burgesses, and none of them is easy to understand. The King has 20 (or 32) houses of former earls Algar and William, and it is said that there are (but not that he has) inside and outside the walls 243 houses (*domus*) paying geld and 500 less 22 so waste and destroyed they cannot pay geld. A royal demesne of over 700 houses would be remarkable, but then the mention of geldable houses in this way is unique, and it is entirely possible that this is meant as an overall total figure of all houses, provided by the borough reeves to the Domesday inquiry.

The second group comprises the holding of the major county landholders, listing a total of 180 houses (*mansiones*), 77 of them 'waste'. On the indications elsewhere in Domesday we can surmise that this list was made by Domesday clerks from the information provided by the landholders from their rural estates, and as already discussed there are several statements showing that some of these houses 'belonged' to those rural manors. If the list

for Oxford resembles that for other boroughs, the remarkable feature is the statement that 'all the above hold these mansions free for repair of the walls', and the amplification that 'in King Edward's reign all those called mural mansions were free of all custom except expedition and repair of the walls' ('custom' being customary payments including ground rent, but presumably not including geld). Since this matter is uniquely mentioned in Oxford, it is impossible to say whether it was a special arrangement prevailing in Oxford, or a chance explanation offered for a widespread arrangement.

The third group is the most interesting and unusual, for another 80 mansions (24 of them waste) are listed as belonging to churches, and to 39 individuals with names such as Alwin, Dereman, Edric, Godric, Segrim, and Swetman. These are not county landowners and would appear to be the surviving pre-conquest burgesses of Oxford. Whether this is a town rental (some names are repeated) or a burgess register is not certain, though as they also seem to be included in the category of 'mural mansions' they are unlikely to have been making any customary rent payments.

The total number of the second and third lists is 260 mansions of which 101 were waste, which is probably close enough to the 243 geld-paying houses of the opening statement to be the same figure, arrived at by different means (and means that over three quarters of the waste houses had been abandoned, with no recognised owner). The alternative approach to the Domesday figures, of adding all the figures up gives a total in excess of a thousand houses. This is not impossible, but would imply that many properties had already been sub-divided into the minor shops and tenements familiar from later medieval Oxford.

Whatever the Domesday statistics may mean, the town's annual payment to the crown from customary payments such as 'toll and gable' had increased threefold, and despite the large number of 'waste' houses—of which not a few must have gone into the castle—there was a recognisable population of pre-conquest burgesses who had not been dispossessed, and whose properties had a lower percentage of wastage than those of the major landholders. This could as readily suggest exploitation as prosperity, of course, and the likelihood is that there was a significant element of both at work; the archaeological evidence for the 'waste' is considered in more detail below.

Domesday Book also contains valuable sidelights on late Saxon Oxford—the reference to the King's eight virgates has already been alluded to, and the chance information provided on Oxford's churches. Like Leicester and Warwickshire in the same Domesday circuit there is a description of the military services owed by the burgesses (20 men to go with the King, or pay 20s). The entry ends with the famous mention of Port Meadow 'all the burgesses of Oxford have pasture outside the walls

in common, paying 6s 8d', a privilege maintained by the Freemen of Oxford until this day.

Occupation in the town: 'waste' and continuity

The evidence for substantial development of the principal and minor street frontages during the early 11th century has been reviewed above. The subsequent history of these properties in the late 11th century suggests that there was significant dislocation after the Conquest, although only the western part of the town is likely to have been completely abandoned. Domesday Book records a very high level of waste property in Oxford by 1086, and the archaeological evidence provides some indication of what may have been happening. This is reviewed below, but it is perhaps worth noting at this point that the late 11th-century archaeology of the excavated properties does not entirely explain the widespread abandonment of the characteristic early 11th-century cellared buildings. Who demolished and backfilled so many of these structures at this time, and why, is not at all clear from the archaeological record, and it remains entirely possible that subtle variations in the chronology of this process are masked by the relatively crude dating available from the pottery evidence.

Excavations at 113–119 High St (Fig. 2.8; Gaz No. 118) showed clear signs of localised retraction of settlement in this area, or change in its socio-economic organisation (Walker and King 2000, 439). During the early 11th century this site had seen intensive development, with the construction of at least three cellared structures, and possibly four or five. Two phases of a ground-level building were also present. The cellars had fallen into disuse by the middle of the 11th century; at least one may have been left open for a while after the superstructure was dismantled, as a number of cess pits and rubbish pits, and a well-shaft, were dug through its final floor. The infilling layers above are dated to the later 11th century, and contained large quantities of butchery debris. Even after this phase of infilling, the excavator suggests there would still have been a large hollow in excess of 0.35 m deep on the site. Subsequently the area seems to have been turned over to pit digging for the disposal of cess and rubbish, and it remained open and undivided throughout the 12th century. Similar evidence was recovered in the recent excavations at Lincoln College (Gaz No. 123). Here, a substantial cellared building occupied the site during the second half of the 11th century, but it appears to have fallen into disuse before its final destruction by fire, in the late 11th or early 12th century. This is mirrored at 11–18 Queen St (Gaz No. 85) where the area that had been occupied during the late Saxon period, towards the centre of the land block, seems to have been abandoned from the later 11th century. Few archaeological features of the later 11th or 12th century were recorded, and the excavator suggests that the area was given over to gardens and intermittent

pit digging (Halpin 1983, 50). South of the town, along the line of the Thames crossing, the 10th- to early 11th-century building at 89-91 St Aldate's (this volume, Chapter 3 below) was abandoned until the late 12th or early 13th century.

A slightly different picture comes from All Saints Church (this volume, Chapter 5 below). Here, the large cellared building of the early 11th century was backfilled and a small, single-celled stone church was constructed on the site, cutting across what appear to have been the earlier property divisions (Fig. 5.10, Phase 4).

Elsewhere there is evidence for continuity. Along the line of the Thames crossing there was a building on the site of 79-80 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 94) in the mid to late 11th century, and the excavator suggested this may have been a workshop fronting onto the crossing with a house behind. There is also evidence for continuity along the more prestigious street frontages in the town centre. At the corner of Queen St and St Ebbe's (Gaz No. 86) numerous late 11th- and 12th-century pits were found, including a large rectilinear cess pit infilled in the late 11th century. There was no sign that the area had been abandoned, and Sturdy and Munby suggest the fact that no pits were dug along the street frontage may imply the presence of a built-up frontage (1985, 84). At the east end of Queen St the occupation at Nos 4 and 7-8 appears to have been uninterrupted (this volume, Chapter 5 below). At No. 4 burnt floors and hearths and a single slot or gully were associated with the later 11th- to 12th-century early Medieval Oxford Ware (Fabric AC). At Nos 7-8 there was a good deal of evidence suggestive of a metalworking workshop. Clusters of postholes and stakeholes suggest sequences of structures associated with successive hearths and burnt daub and floors; finds included iron slag, lead waste and copper alloy waste, a possible tool or punch and a possible stone stamp. Two spindlewhorls, one of fired clay and another of decorated stone, suggest domestic cloth production. There was a substantial degree of redeposition on the site, and some of this activity may be pre-Conquest in date; however, the pottery evidence suggests that much is datable to the second half of the 11th century, possibly continuing into the first half of the 12th century. Notable amongst the pottery was imported ware from Andenne in Belgium.

In Cornmarket, the clearest evidence for continuity comes from the Clarendon Hotel site (Fig. 2.6; Gaz No. 33). Here, well B1B was dug towards the frontage of one of the proposed late Saxon plots after the infilling of the early 11th-century cellar-pit on the site (B1A). The well seems to have been in use during the later 11th century, and it was succeeded by a second well, B1C, in the late 11th century (Jope and Pantin 1958, 13-16). The front part of the plot was cleared and levelled with brown loamy clay, which formed the base for an early 12th-century floor. The brown loamy clay was cut by the footings for a stone vaulted cellar; to the east of the cellar

footings was the debris of wattle and daub buildings that had apparently been cleared to make space for it. At the time of excavation it was considered that the initial construction of the stone vaulted cellar dated from the period 1140-1166, after the acquisition of the site by Oseney Abbey (*ibid.*, 22). Observations following subsequent redevelopment of the site, reported by Brian Durham (1984b), found evidence for a construction trench for the vault that implied the initial build was rather earlier, perhaps even prior to 1100. On the same site, slightly to the south, a well (C2C) was dug through the large early cellar C2B, and its fills were datable to the second half of the 11th century. Most significant of all is the evidence that the large cellared hall D6 was not backfilled until the late 11th or early 12th century (Jope and Pantin 1958, 31). This building is of particular interest since it is set well back from the street frontage, with its long axis aligned parallel to Cornmarket rather than at right-angles to it. Although it has been included in the discussion of the early 11th-century buildings on the site (see above), there is no doubt that it looks very different from them in character, and it is possible that it provides almost the only evidence currently available in Oxford for the form in which this building tradition continued after the Norman Conquest, until it was arguably superseded by the stone vaults of the 12th century.

In the south-west of the town, at Church St (Gaz No. 24), considerable quantities of rubbish were being discarded in pits in association with later 11th-century pottery. This suggests that the area was inhabited, but there were no buildings; as in the early 11th century, the pits may have belonged to occupied houses fronting onto St Ebbe's St.

The archaeological evidence for occupation in Oxford in the later 11th century therefore suggests that there were marked differences in the fortunes of individual tenements during the period. Some, such as 7-8 Queen St and 79-80 St Aldate's, clearly suggest continuity and even prosperity at a modest level. Greater prosperity is suggested by buildings at the Clarendon Hotel site, cellared hall D6, and possibly the stone vaulted cellar, if it is really as early as the late 11th century. These must have been the residences of rich men and institutions who were prospering under the new regime. The same may be true of All Saints Church; this looks very like the construction of a private church on a property newly formed by the amalgamation of several late Saxon holdings. Perhaps the same happened on Turl St, where St Mildred's church was founded before 1122 in an area where the late Saxon structures on the Lincoln College site had been demolished and not replaced. Whether this was the work of Normans or of survivors of the old regime cannot be suggested from present evidence, although clearly either is possible. Julian Munby's review of Oxford in Domesday Book (above) shows that there were numerous Anglo-Saxon landholders in the town in the 1080s, and all the moneyers recorded for the town

under the Conqueror and William Rufus had Anglo-Saxon names (Blair 1994, 177). Blair draws attention to the career of two of Oxford's Anglo-Saxon landholders, who appear to have enriched themselves during this period by cooperating with the Normans (1994, 175). In 1086, Saewold, the last Anglo-Saxon sheriff of the town, had an Oxfordshire estate comprising 18 hides and including 9 houses in Oxford; it appears that he had acquired manors at Waterstock and Tiddington that had previously belonged to one Aelfwig. According to Domesday Book, Aelfsige of Faringdon held only 2 hides in King Edward's time. In 1086 he had amassed a substantial estate, including much land that had formerly been held by Earl Harold. It is entirely possible that the consolidation of the late Saxon holdings at All Saints Church was due to some process such as this.

Whether the apparently abandoned holdings at 89–91 St Aldate's, 113–119 High St, 11–18 Queen St and Lincoln College can be identified with the 'waste' recorded by Domesday Book is arguable, but it must be very probable. At each of these sites it was the opinion of the excavator not only that no evidence for occupation had been seen, but that there was clear evidence for abandonment, and in all cases this abandonment seems to have been long-lived. If these properties were among the 'waste', there does not seem to have been wholesale wasting of entire areas of the town, such as might be expected following a natural disaster or an armed attack. Instead, the waste is piecemeal; one tenement is abandoned, but its near neighbour along the street, or across the road, is still occupied. Could this suggest that at least some of the 'waste' was due to the dislocation of land ownership and trade following the Conquest? The general confiscation of estates must have affected landholders with property in Oxford, and the fate of these people is not at all clear. Presumably a number of them had died, or had fled the country; others must have been significantly impoverished. Changes in the ownership of estates, as well as heavy taxation, war and civil unrest, presumably also affected established patterns of trade and supply. At 113–119 High St, butchery rubbish continued to be disposed of on the site throughout the later 11th century, but the buildings had gone. Does this suggest the continuation of trade, but at a reduced level, in a town that no longer enjoyed the patronage of the greatest magnates, and which therefore needed far fewer grand buildings? Oxford had been an important place in late Anglo-Saxon England; it had been the site of numerous royal councils and had been visited by royalty on several recorded occasions. In contrast, William I may never have visited the town at all, and Blair suggests that Oxford and its shire were much less significant places in late 11th-century England than they had been a couple of generations previously (1994, 172). The barony of Robert d'Oilly that was centred on the town was a minor one; the bishopric was transferred out of the county to Lincoln, and

St Frideswide's was a relatively obscure minster. It is at least arguable that the major landholders of the Conqueror's England would have had little or no interest in the town beyond the revenues they could draw from their holdings there, and may never have visited their Oxford properties; interestingly, the proportion of waste was higher among the holdings of major landowners than among the recognisable pre-Conquest burgesses (see Munby, above). Perhaps Oxford's exceptional success in the early 11th century in part explains why there was so much waste by the time of Domesday. The town that had been booming two generations earlier as the centre of its shire and an appropriate meeting place for Danes and Englishmen, and for Wessex and Mercia, had lost its political significance and was declining into a backwater. The contrast with contemporary Winchester is striking and instructive, where massive royal investment in new buildings was underway from the Conquest onwards (Biddle and Keene 1976, 471).

REVIVAL UNDER THE NORMANS: THE LATER 11TH AND 12TH CENTURIES (FIG. 2.9)

The Thames Crossing

Signs of revival in Oxford's fortunes are clearly visible before the end of the 11th century. Three entries in the Chronicle of Abingdon Abbey record that Robert d'Oilly constructed a great bridge ('Grandpont') at Oxford (*Chron. Abingdon*, ii, 15, 25, 284), and archaeological research has shown that a Norman stone causeway survives within the core of the modern Thames crossing and southern exit route from Oxford, St Aldate's and the Abingdon Road (Fig. 2.10; Plate 2.8). Excavations at 65 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 93) suggested that the late Saxon ford was silting up in the late 11th century, and d'Oilly may have needed to act in order to restore a crossing that was falling into disrepair and disuse. Evidence that d'Oilly's bridge was built in stone, and that substantial sections of it are preserved in the existing crossing, was gathered together by Durham (1984a, 87–95). Archaeological recording at 33 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 91) had identified a 4 m wide ragstone structure beneath the modern road (Durham 1984a, fig. 14) that seemed very likely to be the Grandpont, and this stimulated interest in further research. In 1984 a survey was undertaken that recorded five Norman arches south of the modern Folly Bridge (Gaz No. 48); these were seen to be further Corallian ragstone vaults between 3.6 and 4 m in width. A series of observations of roadworks and manholes on the surface water drain suggested that a solid mortared ragstone core survives within the modern road for a considerable distance south of Folly Bridge. On the basis of this evidence, Durham has suggested the existence of a stone causeway at least 700 m long south of Oxford, consisting of a stone spine with intermittent arches. There was little positive dating evidence for the causeway, although limited pottery was consistent

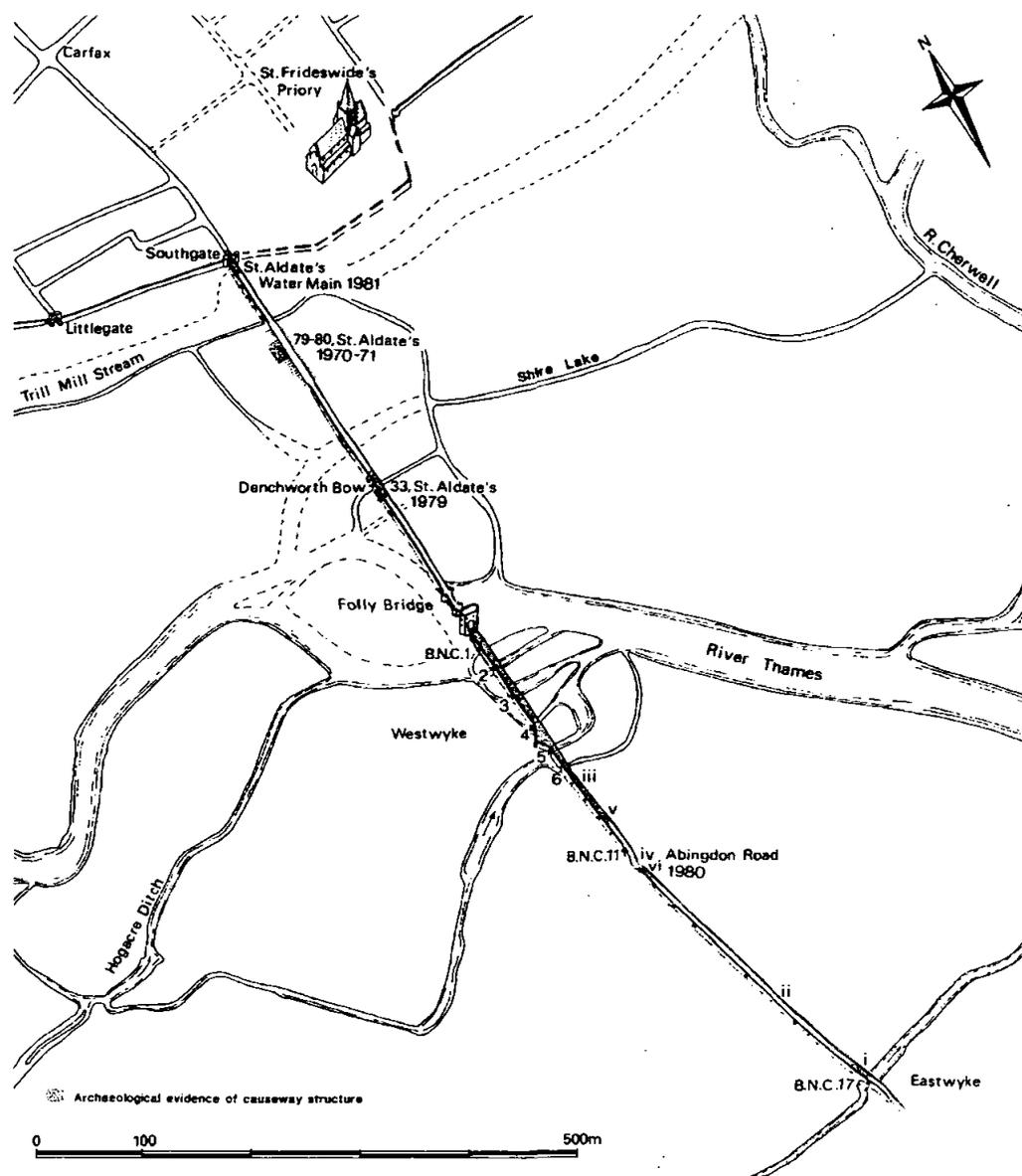


Figure 2.10 Reconstruction of Grandpont (c 13th century) showing the location of archaeological observations. BNC 1-17 are flood arches depicted on the Brasenose College map of the 16th century (this volume Fig. 3.2) (first published in B Durham 'The Thames Crossing at Oxford', *Oxoniensia* 49 (1984), fig. 16).

with a date in the late 11th century, and the evidence of rapid silting over the late Saxon ford in the early 12th century suggested that there had been a major change in the river regime by this time. The original causeway appeared to have been widened and repaired on at least 2 occasions subsequently. Deep tunnelling at the south end of St Aldate's in 1991 (Gaz No. 99, and this volume, Chapter 3, below) revealed further evidence for the stone causeway (Fig. 3.32). Here the tunnelling exposed a 4 m wide structure of grey-mortared Corallian ragstone, which had been built against the east edge of an alluvial island (referred to above as Island 2). The method of construction was seen clearly for the first time, and it was evident that the ragstone superstructure was founded on a raft of stone dumped onto the under-

lying silt and into a construction trench. It was also clear that an extensive reconstruction had taken place in the late 12th or early 13th century.

On the basis of this evidence, it is currently believed that d'Oilly's Grandpont was constructed along the line of the Saxon Thames crossing, that it was 4 m wide and at least 700 m long, and comprised a rubble causeway with intermittent flood arches in the form of Corallian ragstone vaults. A map preserved in the archives of Brasenose College (Fig. 3.2) shows the causeway in the 16th century; 17 flood arches are shown between Folly Bridge and the Hinksey Stream.

The causeway inevitably had a substantial effect on the area of the Thames crossing. In some places it will have created areas of slack water particularly



Plate 2.8 Flood relief arch BNC 2 from the east.

susceptible to silting, thus assisting the process of reclamation and settlement. Elsewhere, it may, initially at least, have made the environment near the crossing line less hospitable, with rising water levels and flooding. Environmental evidence from the BT Tunnel, for example, suggests that this was a dank uninhabited place edged with stagnant reed swamp, and fit only for refuse dumping (Campbell, Chapter 3, below). The final section of Robinson's review of the development of the Thames crossing (Chapter 3, below) suggests that silting associated with the new causeway may have led to the division of the broad channel between Islands 1 and 2 into two much narrower channels around a new island; the new northern channel was the precursor of the channel known in the later medieval period as the Shirelake, and the southern flowed under a causeway arch known as Denchworth Bow. The later medieval topography of the area is shown in Figure 3.10 and summarised in Figure 2.9; this configuration is based on excavated evidence but now also incorporates limited documentary evidence for water channels (see Munby, Chapter 3, below), and the islands and channels shown by Loggan on his map of 1675 (Fig. 3.12).

Clearly, some of the post-Conquest inhabitants of the area were quick to exploit the new opportunities presented by the rapid silting. The mid to late 11th-century building at 79–80 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 94,

see above) was succeeded by a stone-footed building with a well-made central stone hearth. Finds included a cut halfpenny of Stephen, probably datable to c 1141, and the presence of lumps of slag suggest that the occupants may have been involved in light forging. A modest level of prosperity is perhaps suggested by the presence of a rim fragment from a fine Andenne jug in the main floor detritus of the second phase building. Further south, on the east side of the crossing at No. 33 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 91), there is evidence for land reclamation adjacent to the Grandpont causeway almost as soon as it had been constructed. Here, floor and yard surfaces suggest that occupation had been established by the late 11th or 12th century; a layer of charred peas, beans and chaff recovered from the site is likely to represent the burning of a waste heap by the occupant (Robinson 1984). Elsewhere, however, there seems to have been a noticeable lack of activity between the later 11th and late 12th centuries; perhaps the construction of the new crossing led to some discouragement or regulation of encroachment, or perhaps the effect of the causeway on the river had rendered some earlier sites uninhabitable. Evidence from 56–60 St Aldate's (Gaz No. 92, and Chapter 3, below) shows that revetment of the channel banks was still taking place. Here, a new waterfront incorporated four substantial vertical posts joined by a horizontal plank, which had been

set on edge into slots cut into the top of the posts. One of the vertical posts was dated by dendrochronology, and had been felled after 1099 (Table A2.1 and Chapter 7, below). The revetment was laced into the ground by angled timbers. This represents a much more substantial structure than the wattle revetments previously used to retain the channel edges along the line of the crossing.

From the later 12th century there is a radical change, and the impetus for this may have come partly from the reconstruction of the Grandpont. Stone buildings dating to the late 12th or early 13th centuries were found at 89–91 St Aldate's, 83 St Aldate's, Linacre College, 79–80 St Aldate's and 56–60 St Aldate's (Gaz Nos 96, 95, 98, 94 and 92). With the exception of the building at 79–80 St Aldate's (see above), these appear to be new foundations rather than replacement buildings. It is possible that it was at this time that the south suburb of Oxford was organised into a regular series of tenements backing onto the mill streams, a conformation which was certainly in existence by the time of the Hundred Rolls survey in 1279 (Munby, Chapter 3, below).

Revival from the later 11th century: the mid-road drain

Within the defended town, another sign of revival and investment after the Conquest comes from the evidence that a substantial mid-road drain was in place along the principal streets at this time. The first observation was made in 1970, when the section across Castle St that had revealed layers of early street surfaces also showed two successive features with a profile very like deep drainage channels, cut along the central line of the street (Fig. 2.5; Gaz No. 14). Disturbance by modern services meant that only the south side of the channels could be recorded; the earlier channel was in excess of 0.90 m deep, and the later roughly 0.50 m deep. Further observations of the mid-road drain were made in the High St and Catte St during the early 1980s (Gaz Nos 60 and 16, reported in full in this volume, Chapter 5, below). Here, typical sections of the drain (Fig. 5.26) showed it to be a straight-sided trench roughly 1–1.2 m deep and 0.90 m or more wide. There was some evidence to suggest that it may have had a timber lining, and there may have been soakaways at various points along its length. A number of observations showed that the drain had been recut on a slightly deviating line.

The drain had apparently been filled with rubble by the 14th or 15th century to form a shallow trough some 0.20 m deep, but the date of its origin is harder to establish from the few associated finds. The best evidence came from Castle St, where the earlier drain contained late 11th-century pottery, and the recut contained 12th-century pottery, and a small number of sherds of early Medieval Oxford Ware (fabric AC) in primary silts of the drain at a couple of observations in the High St would support this dating. As with so many of the features of 11th-

century Oxford, it is very hard to say whether this implies a primary construction before or after the Conquest, and either is possible. The excavator has suggested the possibility that the drain may have been following the line of a feature of the primary surface (see Chapter 5, below), although the evidence for this is at present very slight. At the least, however, it can be said that the drain was open and functioning in post-Conquest Oxford, and it was recut within the course of the next century as it silted up. It is interesting to note in this context Wilson's comment on the bone evidence from Church St (1989a, 262) that there seems to have been relatively organised and efficient disposal of waste in the area during the 11th to 13th centuries, with evidence for a possible decline in standards later.

Churches and religious houses in Norman Oxford

In addition to St Frideswide's Priory, thirteen churches or chapels are recorded within the walled town by 1122, and sixteen by 1206; three extra-mural churches or chapels were present by the mid 12th century, and a fourth probably by 1189 x 1191. However, the dating of Oxford's churches currently relies substantially on the evidence of documentary sources and the problems are compounded by the fact that very little architectural evidence of the 12th century survives outside the former priory itself, now Oxford Cathedral. Numerous medieval churches were closed before the 15th century, or incorporated into newly founded colleges (including St Mildred's, St Edward's and St Budoc's); others became unsafe and collapsed or were demolished (notably St Peter le Bailey, St Ebbe's, All Saints and St Martin's), and most others have been the subject of heavy and sometimes unsympathetic restoration, especially during the 19th century.

Three churches (St Frideswide's, St Ebbe's and St Martin's) are certainly of Anglo-Saxon date, and are mentioned in early 11th-century charters; St Michael at the Northgate, St Mary the Virgin and St Peter in the East are mentioned in Domesday Book, and archaeological and architectural evidence suggests that at least St Michael's and St Peter's were pre-Conquest in origin (see above). There is currently no evidence to suggest whether St Mary's originated before or after 1066, although its connection with the estate of the Earl of Northumbria and the outlying township of Littlemore perhaps hints at Saxon origins. Burial was taking place at the site of St Aldate's Church during the late Saxon period, but there is no evidence yet for a church of this date, and a cemetery here could have been administered directly by St Frideswide's minster on the opposite side of the road.

Two churches are known to have been founded in the immediate post-Conquest period. St George's in the Castle was founded by Robert d'Oilly in 1074 as a college of secular canons (*VCH* iv, 381), although d'Oilly may have been refounding an earlier church here (see above). All Saints in the High St is the only

church to have been the subject of extensive archaeological excavations (Gaz No. 59, reported in full in this volume, Chapter 5, below), which have shown that it was probably founded in the later 11th century on a site formed by an amalgamation of pre-Conquest holdings, although it is first mentioned in written sources as a property of St Frideswide in 1122 (CSF i, p 11). In origin it may have been a private church; it was a small, square single-celled structure, built with footings of stone, and quite possibly entirely in stone (Fig. 5.10). During the latter part of the 11th century a short-lived *porticus* was added to the north side of the church, and a small chancel to the east. During the 12th century the nave may have been lengthened, and a belltower added at its west end. Burials were taking place at the church during the 12th century, but it seems to have remained a fairly modest building, and its main period of structural development came in the 13th and 14th centuries (Figs 5.11, 5.12, 5.15).

No other churches can currently be traced back earlier than 1122, when Henry I confirmed St Frideswide's Priory's right to the churches of All Saints, St Edward's, St Mildred's and St Peter le Bailey, and the gate churches or chapels of St Michael at the Northgate, St Michael at the Southgate, and Holy Trinity at the Eastgate (CSF, i, p 11). The priory claimed to have been granted St Aldate's in 1122, but the claim was disputed by Abingdon Abbey; the two shared the church from c 1200 throughout the medieval period (VCH iv, 373). St Martin's and St Ebbe's remained in the possession of Abingdon and Eynsham abbeys respectively; d'Oilly held St Peter in the East, St George in the Castle and probably the extramural church of St Mary Magdalen, and St Mary the Virgin may have reverted to the Crown following the fall of Earl Aubrey (VCH iv, 391).

A 'vicarage of St Frideswide's church' is mentioned in records of presentations during the early 13th century, and it is clear that the priory had control of an urban parish from at least c 1180. It is unclear, however, whether there was ever a parish church, and there is evidence to suggest that there may instead have been a parochial altar located within the north-east chapels of the priory church itself (see Blair 1988a, 255–8, for a discussion of the evidence). In the event, the benefice was suppressed in 1298 and the parish was united with that of St Edward's. St Budoc, outside the castle, is first mentioned in 1166; it was subsequently demolished and relocated after the building of the eastern barbican in 1216; it lost its parochial functions in 1265, and became the chapel of the Friars of the Sack (VCH iv, 376). Hassall's excavations on the eastern defences of Oxford castle (Gaz No. 75) located what was probably the south wall of the original church, and two burials. The burials sealed pits containing late 11th- to early 12th-century pottery, suggesting that the church was a 12th-century foundation. The church of St John the Baptist is first mentioned in 1206; its true age is

unknown, although at that time the advowson belonged to the *curia* in which the church was situated. It had been appropriated by Merton College by 1292, and it became the college chapel, although continuing to fulfil parochial functions (VCH iv, 384).

Three suburban churches are in evidence by the early 12th century. St Cross in the eastern suburb of Holywell was a chapel of St Peter in the East, and its date is suggested by the surviving chancel arch thought by the RCHM surveyors to date to c 1100 (1939, 128–9). This presumably served the extramural settlement of men with little gardens mentioned by Domesday Book (see above, discussion of late Saxon suburbs). The church of St Mary Magdalen outside the Northgate was confirmed to St George's in the Castle in 1127, and may have been a rather earlier foundation, possibly acquired by d'Oilly when St George's was established in 1074 (VCH iv, 387). Together with St George's, it was subsequently given to Robert d'Oilly II's foundation of Oseney Abbey (see below) in 1149. The suburban church of St Giles, located some distance north of St Mary Magdalen, was confirmed to its builder, Edwin son of Godegose, by Henry I in 1123 × 33. At its dedication it was granted the tithes of Walton, and soon became parochial; in 1139 Edwin granted it to the newly founded Godstow nunnery (VCH iv, 381). The church of St Thomas the Martyr was founded by Oseney Abbey to serve the growing western suburb of the Norman town; it was probably started between 1189 and 1191 when the Bishop of Lincoln authorised the abbey to build a chapel before their gate for their servants, guests and parishioners (VCH iv, 403); the abbey's possession of a chapel of St Thomas was confirmed by the Pope between 1216 and 1227.

Little is known about the minster of St Frideswide's after the first decade of the 11th century, and it is possible that it went into decline at this point. There is evidence to suggest that during the reign of Cnut the minster was given to Abingdon Abbey, although it was back in the canons' hands again by 1086, and had probably been restored to them by 1049 (Blair 1988, 227). Writing of the minster shortly before its refoundation, William of Malmesbury said 'only a few clerks remained there, who lived as they pleased' (*Gesta Pontificum*). In about 1120, however, the old minster was refounded as a priory of regular Augustinian canons and this marked the start of a spectacularly successful period. Major rebuilding works began around the middle of the 12th century, to construct the new priory church and its cloister, and these continued until the end of the century (and beyond), interrupted by a serious fire in 1190 (Blair 1988a *passim*). Much of the priory's success may be attributable to the growing cult of St Frideswide (Plate 2.9), assiduously promoted by the 12th-century canons, which culminated in a splendid ceremony in 1180 when the Archbishop of Canterbury himself translated the saint's relics to a new shrine in the presence of King Henry II (VCH iv, 12). The cult seems to have been particularly favoured by



Plate 2.9 *St Frideswide's shrine.*

women, and pilgrims to the shrine in the late 12th century were principally drawn from the knights, townsmen and prosperous peasantry and their women living within a radius of 40 miles around Oxford (Mayr-Harting 1985).

The 12th century saw the foundation of a number of other religious houses, all comparatively close to the town but outside its walls. The most important was a second Augustinian house, Oseney Abbey, founded in 1129 by Robert d'Oilly II on an island between two branches of the Thames, roughly 1 km west of Oxford town centre. As a result of extremely astute financial management, Oseney rapidly became the wealthiest of Oxfordshire's religious houses. In the 13th century the abbey was apparently running a substantial banking business, taking money on deposit from the residents of Oxford that seems to have been used for extensive investment in properties in the town, and Oseney is conspicuous in the medieval documentation of Oxford as a major landlord (*VCH* ii, 91). Almost nothing now survives of the abbey's formerly extensive precinct; most of the buildings had been demolished by the mid 16th century, and the last remnants of the church were taken down in the mid 17th century. Very little archaeological work has been carried out on the site;

a summary of works to date and a study of the documentary and cartographic evidence was published by Sharpe (1985) and has not been superseded.

The abbey of Godstow, a house of Benedictine nuns, was founded around 1133 by Dame Edith, a rich widow of Winchester, to the north-west of the town. The abbey was an aristocratic nunnery that enjoyed generous royal support throughout the 12th century, firstly from King Stephen and his family, who were present at the dedication of its church in 1139 (*VCH* ii, 71–5), and subsequently from Henry II after his mistress 'fair Rosamond' was buried there in 1176. Her tomb apparently came to be treated almost like a shrine, and when Bishop Hugh visited Godstow in 1191 he ordered that her body should be removed from before the high altar and buried outside (*ibid.*, 72). Most of the abbey buildings were destroyed during the Civil War, when their owner burnt them to prevent them falling into the hands of the Parliamentary army, although one surviving building is today the celebrated Trout Inn. Minor archaeological observations in the area have uncovered some evidence for timber and stone buildings, and numerous burials (some in stone and elm coffins) have been recovered during river engineering works in the vicinity. The Hospital of St Bartholomew, for twelve

lepers and a chaplain, was founded by Henry I before 1129; the hospital lay roughly 1 km east of the town, within the manor of Headington. By the end of the 12th century the Hospital of St John had been founded, probably near the east wall of the town, and possibly just outside it; its first site, and the date and circumstances of its foundation, are unknown. It was refounded by Henry III in 1231 on a new site granted by the king outside the Eastgate, that had previously been the Jewish cemetery (VCH ii, 158). The 12th-century hospital has not been located by excavation, but its successor formed the subject of detailed archaeological and architectural investigations in 1987, subsequently published with a full synthetic discussion (Durham 1991).

The King's Houses

The King's Houses, later known as Beaumont Palace, were built by Henry I outside the Northgate of the town, and may have been substantially complete when the king spent Easter there in 1132 (VCH iv, 304). During the 12th and 13th centuries the palace was a favoured royal resting place en route to and from the royal hunting lodge at Woodstock. Richard I was born at Beaumont in 1157, and John in 1167. Building accounts show continuing expenditure on elaborate accommodation at the site throughout the 12th and early 13th centuries (HKW 986–7), but royal visits ceased in the later 13th century and the houses were leased out. In 1318 Edward II granted the site to the Carmelite friars, who occupied it until the Dissolution. No trace of medieval buildings survives above ground on the site, which is now built over, and most archaeological finds in the vicinity derive from the friary rather than the palace. Recent excavations at the site recovered evidence for a small plantation of trees, possibly an orchard or garden, datable to the 12th to 13th century, and for the walls of two substantial stone buildings. These may have originated as palace buildings (and fragments of stained glass from one were of the appropriate date), subsequently taken over and adapted by the friary. The nature of the buildings, however, could not be established from the available evidence (Gaz No. 122). The construction of Beaumont Palace represents a considerable revival in Oxford's political fortunes following the decline of the immediate post-Conquest years. When Henry came to his new houses in 1132 he may have been the first king to have had a residence at Oxford since 1066. The changing political situation after Henry's death rapidly brought Oxford back to prominence as a key strategic stronghold for the campaigns of the Anarchy. The focus during this time was more probably the castle than the palace, though the palace was defended by a wall with a substantial gate, and during his siege of Oxford Castle, Stephen must presumably have been based at the palace while the castle was occupied by his rival. He is known to have been in the town twice in 1135 and subsequently in 1139, 1140, 1142, 1145 and 1154, and

probably also in 1146, 1149 and 1151, and Matilda spent much of 1141 and 1142 in the town (VCH iv, 11). Henry II visited on a number of occasions, and councils were held in the town during his reign and that of his son, Richard I. During the reign of King John, Oxford was again of considerable strategic importance at a time of civil conflict, and John visited Oxford frequently; in 1215 the town several times served as a meeting place for the opposing parties, notably in July when the king met the barons (VCH iv, 12).

Oxford in the 12th century: the development of the town and its suburbs

Some reorganisation of the street layout of the town can be attributed to the 12th century. The realignment of Cornmarket at this date to a new frontage some 4 m west of the late Saxon line has been discussed above. Queen St/Castle St had probably already been significantly realigned during the 11th century; evidence for early encroachment on these streets and for change following the construction of the castle has also been reviewed above. The construction of a tower at All Saints Church (this volume, Chapter 5 below) deflected the line of Turl St to the west, and this may have happened during the 12th or early 13th century. A number of minor streets were added to the town plan; these included Logic Lane and Kybald St in the south-east (Gaz No. 63); St Frideswide's Lane, which appears to have been laid out over an area of earlier occupation when the precinct of St Frideswide's priory was extended to the north (Gaz No. 19); and Brasenose Lane, where evidence suggests that the earliest street surfaces are of 12th-century date (Gaz Nos 3 and 4). Many minor streets presumably came into existence as lanes or alleys giving access to houses behind street frontage properties. The alleyway now called Frewin Court, for example (Fig. 2.6), occurs in 12th-century deeds of Oseney Abbey; in a deed of c 1184–98 a shop near the alleyway was leased as '*seldam illam que est propinquior vie que tendit a magno vico versus curiam Gaufridi filii Durandi*' (Blair 1987, 54, 96). Street drainage was maintained in this period, and evidence discussed above suggests that a mid-road drain along Queen St/Castle St and the High St was recut during the 12th century.

It seems likely that there was still a good deal of empty space in the town during the 12th century. The properties at Lincoln College, 113–119 High St and 11–18 Queen St (Gaz Nos 123, 118 and 85) were not reoccupied during this period. The last of these may simply have become part of the yard or garden of a street-front tenement, although there was apparently a building on the site again in the 13th century, when fragmentary floor and occupation layers of early to mid 13th-century date were recorded. As Sturdy and Munby have pointed out, once a continuously built-up street frontage evolved, there may be little archaeological evidence for it beyond a lack of pit digging along the street

(1985, 84). A clearer understanding of this process is only likely to be arrived at through a combination of above-ground recording of buildings and below-ground investigation of the archaeological evidence for their evolution, and for earlier land use and its dating. Opportunities for such work have been extremely rare in the town, and are likely to remain so, but where it has been possible the evidence is extraordinarily informative. The results from 89 St Aldate's showed that a standing 17th-century house was the latest in a sequence of houses on the site, reusing stone foundations (both for the main walls and for internal partitions) that had been constructed in the 13th century (Gaz No. 96, reported in full in Chapter 3, below). The 13th-century house represented the start of permanent occupation of the site, although there had previously been a building here during the late Saxon period, whose construction was datable by dendrochronology to the period 925–963. Just as important was the evidence that the site had been abandoned during the later 11th and 12th centuries, probably because of periodic flooding from the Trill Mill stream channel immediately to the south, when the new Grandpont causeway was disrupting the water regime of the area, and when pressure for building land in the town may have been at a relatively low level. It is also of interest to note that the first appearance of this tenement in documentary records, in the Hundred Rolls Survey of 1279, is genuinely reflective of its actual date of origin.

12th- and 13th-century houses
by Julian Munby

The development of post-Conquest Oxford houses is to be followed in the extensive documentation of institutional landholding, rather than in existing or excavated remains. The early deeds of the Hospital of St John, now in Magdalen College, and those of Oseney Abbey in Christ Church are particularly rewarding, but there are at least twelve other collections with significant holdings. There are few deeds surviving from before the last decades of the 12th century, but they are very numerous for the 13th, and culminate in the detailed description of the town in the 1279 Hundred Rolls. Unlike some towns, there are no enrolled deeds for Oxford, though wills relating to real property were entered in the town's *Liber Albus* from the early 14th century. One result of the institutional bias in record survival is that properties remaining as freeholds are often comparatively poorly documented, especially on the western side of Oxford.

The earliest deeds are often of limited value on account of their use of the indeterminate word 'land' (*terra*) for properties, without further explanation, though these must usually have included buildings. The later use of the words 'message' or 'tenement' similarly comprises both land and buildings, and tells us little, though they are often amplified with further descriptions. With the rapid commercial

growth of the town, increasingly small parts of properties were subject to conveyance, and individual 'selds' and shops appear. For detailed descriptions we have to wait for the later medieval leases that occasionally include a fuller account of the property.

Towards the end of the 12th century stone houses are mentioned with increasing frequency in deeds, and sufficiently often to suggest a general phase of building activity at that date. These occur across Oxford, concentrated in the commercial centre, and whilst appearing in the Jewry in the St Aldate's area, not being confined there. One surviving example is the cellar under Frewin Hall (Plate 2.10), part of a large stone mansion set in a large plot behind the west side of Cornmarket (Blair 1978). Three houses are known from early drawings: John Aubrey drew a window in the Chequers, High Street (Bodl. MS Top Gen. c.25), very similar to a single romanesque window found in 1900 at the corner of St Ebbe's and Church Street, on the site of a *domus lapidea* where the Greyfriars had their first home (Hurst MS Top. Oxon. c.312, p.54). An unidentified house with romanesque windows is shown in a view by John Green, c 1750 (Bodl. MS Gough Oxon 50), that can now be shown to be Billing Hall in Castle Street since a recently discovered drawing by John Malchair locates the house there. It would also seem likely that the great stone house of Isaac, later the Lower Gildhall, survived as the fabric of the Gildhall, judging from another of John Green's views. A set of romanesque voussoirs, now in Hertford College, which had been found on the site of Magdalen Hall (west of Magdalen College) in the 18th century, probably came from the Hospital of St John (Gunther 1916). The remains of a stone house were found in 1954–5 in the demolition of the Clarendon Hotel in Cornmarket (Gaz No. 33), where the side wall of a building at right-angles to the road was identified, with slots for the first-floor beams, and the edge of a stone fireplace. Beneath this was discovered a stone barrel-vaulted cellar, dated to 1150–70, which was again uncovered when the Clarendon Centre was built. This was 'Setretton's House' of Oseney Abbey, a commercial front and a domestic mansion at the rear, all described in a deed of c 1190 (Jope and Pantin 1958, 13, 106–11; CO i, 60).

One of the first recognisable house types is the 'cellar and solar', mentioned in many deeds from around 1220, and located in many parts of Oxford. A 'solar' is simply a first floor chamber, and the conjunction of this and a cellar perhaps implies a partially sunken ground-floor room with a principal room over it. It would be analogous with the 'detached chamber blocks' of rural manors, though these have recently been reassessed by John Blair, and demoted from being a standard type of hall dwelling to being an adjunct to a separate hall (Blair 1993). One possible candidate for this type of building is the Merton College Stables, opposite the front gate of the college, which seems to be a remarkable survival of an early 13th-century house.



Plate 2.10 The 12th-century vaulted cellar at Frewin Hall.

With plain walls on the ground floor, and with few window openings above, another of Green's views shows what appear to be late romanesque windows in the same positions. The house was acquired by Merton in 1291/2 (Salter, SE (187)), and became the college stables, thus fossilising the walls of the house (the roof is of late medieval type).

Halls are also mentioned from the mid 13th century, sometimes in conjunction with cellar-and-solar, but later with a seld (shop) and solar, which gives us the standard late medieval Oxford town house. This had one or more shops on the street front beneath a solar, with a hall behind, often held under a separate tenancy. While the shops might be timber framed, the hall was more likely to be of stone. The type-site for this was Tackley's Inn at 106-7 High Street, probably built as an Academic Hall and with the cellar later used as the Oriel College tavern (Pantin 1942; Munby 1978). Houses of this type have been recognised on many sites in Oxford, even where both halves have been rebuilt yet preserving the former division, and are frequently referred to in property deeds. Academic Halls, lived in by a small group of students, were often of this type, having no essential difference from ordinary houses (Pantin 1964b), and indeed although there were many named halls in academic use (eg Chimney Hall,

White Hall), it would seem that private houses also had 'hall' names, and the reference was to their architectural form and not just their usage.

It is only in the later 14th century that there is any evidence of the timber fronts rising for more than two storeys. Most of the surviving Oxford cellars are also of 14th- or 15th-century date, and are often associated with wine taverns or inns, a feature that is also apparent at Winchester (Keene 1985).

There is little evidence for humbler houses of this period within the area of the walled town, although the increasing documentary records suggest that many must have existed. Pantin's work at the site of Setreton's tenement shows that already by the 12th century a street frontage property could be of two storeys, with a basement and a loft, and the shops at the front were little more than large cubicles. How many of the humbler 12th-century residents of Oxford lived in or over these shops, or as servants in the houses of the rich, is impossible to reconstruct from archaeological evidence, although surely many did.

Suburbs

It has been noted above that there was probably still a considerable amount of empty space in the town in the 12th century. Current evidence for

the development of the post-Conquest suburbs suggests that it was not until the late 12th century, or even the early 13th century, that substantial extramural growth can be seen, and this may reflect the fact that there was still adequate room for expansion inside the walls until this time. The evidence for the south suburb of 12th-century Oxford, along the line of the Thames crossing, has been reviewed above. To the north of the town, suburban occupation developed along the wide approach road to Oxford (now known as St Giles), and along the north side of the town ditch. St Giles was fully built up by the time of the Hundred Rolls Survey of 1279, but there is as yet very little archaeological evidence to suggest how and when the north suburb developed. Jope recovered 12th-century pottery associated with a coin of Henry II of 1168–80 from the fill of a well at St John's College (Jope *et al.* 1950), although there was no opportunity for detailed archaeological excavation. On the opposite side of the road, recent excavations at the Ashmolean Museum (Andrews and Mephram 1997) revealed a group of pits probably used for domestic rubbish disposal towards the rear of properties fronting onto St Giles; none of these was earlier than the late 12th century, and the first clear evidence for a structure on the site was datable to the mid 13th century. Properties fronting the town ditch to the north-east of the Northgate were the subject of limited building recording and archaeological monitoring in 1937 (Gaz No. 8), which recovered evidence for numerous medieval wells and a single pit behind the street-front buildings. Material from this site was used for the creation of the first type-series for Oxford pottery, but the conclusions drawn remain substantially valid today (Mellor 1994, 19). On the basis of the pottery dating, the excavator suggested that there was only sparse evidence for earlier 12th-century activity, and that intensive occupation did not begin in the area until the end of the 12th century, culminating in the 13th century, and lasting into the 14th (Bruce-Mitford 1939, 145). On the north-west of the town, the recent excavations at the site of Beaumont Palace (Gaz No. 122) found no evidence for medieval occupation before the construction of the palace itself, by 1132. The archaeological evidence for the north suburb thus remains very slight, and can provide no insight into the circumstances of the foundation of the church of St Mary Magdalen outside the Northgate, in existence by 1122, and the church of St Giles, founded as a private church by the period 1123 × 1133, presumably on the suburban estate of its builder, Edwin son of Godegose (see above).

On the east of the town, suburban development is attested in Domesday Book on the manor of Holywell, and the chapel of St Cross was probably in existence by c 1100 (see above). However, as on the north of the town, opportunities for archaeological excavation have been very limited in this area, and there is no excavated evidence for this early extramural activity. An excavation undertaken in 1993 at the rear of

properties fronting onto Holywell St found evidence for occupation beginning in the late 12th to early 13th century (Roberts 1995). Further small-scale work immediately north-east of the medieval Eastgate in 1995 found evidence that the area may have been in cultivation until at least the later 12th century, after which the appearance of rubbish pits suggested that occupation had been established at the front of the properties, which faced onto the High Street (Roberts 1999).

The best studied of Oxford's medieval suburbs is that of St Thomas, which lies west of the town defences, on the floodplain of the Thames. Early extramural occupation here is attested by Domesday Book, which records that land held by Robert d'Oilly in this area included houses inside and outside the walls. This land was subsequently granted by Robert d'Oilly II to his foundation of Oseney Abbey (CO, i, 1–6), and the grants included all the houses he owned on Waram Bank by his mills near Oxford Castle, '*cum omnibus mansuris quas habui supra waram que est de molendinis meis, que sunt iuxta castellum Oxenafordie*'. No archaeological evidence has been found of this early occupation immediately outside the castle, but the interim account of recent excavations immediately to the east of St Thomas's Church suggests that a number of cottages of early 12th-century date may have been located in the vicinity (Moore 2000b). Evidence from several excavations elsewhere suggests that the suburb may have been deliberately developed by Oseney Abbey following the building of the church at the end of the 12th century, but the earliest buildings seen were of early to mid 13th-century date (Palmer 1980; Roberts 1996; Hardy 1996; Cook 1999). Thereafter the suburb developed rapidly during the 13th century; it appears to have been primarily an artisan quarter and a number of the houses were constructed with cob walls.

Crafts and industry in the 12th-century town

Corn, wool, cloth and leather were the staples of the town's economy at this time, and Oxford prospered from its location close to important corn and wool producing areas (VCH iv, 35–6). While the corn trade leaves little archaeological evidence, wool, cloth and leather are more visible in the excavated record. During the medieval period the west side of Cornmarket was the shoemakers' or cordwainers' quarter, and cordwainers appear among the early tenants of the shops. A cess pit towards the back of the Clarendon Hotel site (Gaz No. 33, and see above) contained much leatherwork, which included scraps and cuttings, but also many shoes, which were all badly worn and patched; the excavator suggested they had probably been discarded by the shoemaker as beyond repair (Sturdy 1958). The leather was associated with pottery of the 12th to early 13th centuries. The excavations at Church St (Gaz No. 24) recovered substantial evidence for 12th- and 13th-century crafts including textile-, leather- and metal-working, and skinning. There were numerous finds

of iron teeth from heckle combs used for preparing wool and flax fibres for spinning, and a possible tenter-hook; a needle and a blade from small shears were probably needlework tools. Other clothworking tools included numerous bone and stone spindle-whorls, and bone needles or bodkins, pin beaters, a thread twister and numerous points. Leatherworking was represented by an iron slicker and awl. Opportunistic skinning of small animals for their fur was indicated by marks on 12th- and 13th-century cat and fox bones, and badger bones on the site may have derived from similar activity. Cloth- and leatherworking are attested at 89-91 St Aldate's by the presence of heckle teeth, an awl and slicker and several shoe fragments in late 12th- to 13th-century deposits, and leatherworking is also suggested at Land adjoining the Police Station (for finds reports see Chapter 6, below).

FROM TOWN TO UNIVERSITY

Trade in cloth and wool brought great prosperity to Oxford during the late 12th and early 13th centuries, and by 1227 it was paying more in tallage contributions than any other town except York and London. During this period also, the citizens were establishing their corporate identity and acquiring the privilege of self-government. A sense of corporate identity had existed since at least as early as the mid 11th century, when the reeve and all the citizens of Oxford (*omnes cives*) witnessed a lease by St Alban's Abbey, and Domesday Book records that all the burgesses held pasture in common in Port Meadow. A merchant gild was in existence by 1100, though this may originally have been a smaller and more exclusive body than the community of citizens or burgesses. Oxford's first known charter was granted by Henry II in c 1155, confirming privileges the citizens had enjoyed under Henry I. The citizens had acquired a seal by 1191, enabling them to act as a corporate body; the seal depicts a walled city with the figure of an ox superimposed on it, and is the oldest municipal seal known in Britain (see Davis 1968, esp. pl. vii). The seal is inscribed 'the common seal of all the citizens of the city of Oxford' (+SIGILL(VM) COMMVNE OMNIVM CIVIV(M) CIVITATIS OXENEFORDIE). The town was formally granted to the citizens by King John in a charter of 1199 awarding them the fee-farm. In Davis's words, this 'did not make the town a corporate body, but recognised that it already was one, so that the King could hold it corporately responsible for its dues' (1968, 56). Up to this point, the government of the town had been in the hands of two reeves, who were at least nominally royal officials, and the alderman of the merchant gild spoke for the burgesses. The charter of 1199 gave the burgesses the right to elect the reeves, and during the 13th century a formal system evolved in which the town was governed by a mayor, two bailiffs (formerly the reeves) and four aldermen, aided by a council. The first person to be described as a mayor was Laurence Kepeharm, when he served as alderman between

1205 and 1209. During the 13th century the town undertook a substantial overhaul of its defences, and much of the wall was rebuilt in stone, with turrets and bastions. The wall between Smithgate and Eastgate was double (Palmer 1976), with an outer wall rising straight from the southern side of the town ditch. This extensive refurbishment was financed by a series of murage grants, in the form of tolls on goods coming into the town; it was collected almost every year between 1226 and 1239.

It is during this time, the period of Oxford's greatest prosperity and political importance, that the university first emerges in the historical record. (For much of what follows, see Catto ed. 1984, especially Chapter 1 by R W Southern.) During the late 12th century, the town had become an important centre of clerical activity, and was particularly favoured for ecclesiastical councils and church courts, no doubt at least partly on account of its central position and accessibility. Judges delegated by the Pope (often bishops or abbots) came to Oxford to hear their cases, summoning experts, witnesses and litigants to appear before them, and during the later 12th century the town must have had many ecclesiastical lawyers in residence. It was therefore able to offer extensive opportunities for those wishing to learn canon and Roman law, both from observation in the church courts, and directly from the teaching of masters practising in them as lawyers. These lawyers were the first to draw students to Oxford from distant parts. However, the intensification of war between England and France in the decade after 1193 seems to have provided a critical stimulus for the development of other studies. The war made it difficult for students and masters to travel to the established European universities such as Paris and Bologna, where 12th-century Englishmen had previously obtained their higher education. Possibly as a consequence, the teaching of theology and the liberal arts had begun at Oxford by the end of the 12th century, and a number of distinguished scholars (among them Alexander Neckham and Edmund of Abingdon) were certainly teaching here in the 1190s. It is estimated (Hackett 1984) that there were more than 70 masters teaching in Oxford in the period 1190-1209, most of whom were masters of arts, though doctors of theology, law and even medicine are recorded. The total academic population of the town was probably several hundred. The growth of the university was temporarily checked in 1209, when a dispute broke out between the town and the masters and scholars, most of whom left Oxford. This dispute was settled by the Papal Legate in 1214, on terms clearly designed to attract the academic community back; the settlement placed the townspeople under obligation to provide students with accommodation at cheap rates, and food and necessities at fair prices. The settlement also confirmed the immunity of the scholars from the jurisdiction of town authorities, and a Chancellor was appointed by the diocesan bishop (Lincoln), to be set over the scholars, and to supervise the annual

renewal of the town's oath to observe the terms of the settlement. Despite these generous terms, however, the university appears to have re-established itself only slowly over the course of the next decade; substantial evidence of academic activity begins again in the 1220s, when Robert Grosseteste was teaching. The 1220s also saw the arrival of the friars in Oxford; the Dominicans in 1221, followed by the Franciscans in 1224 (for a full account see Sheehan 1984). Although the friars were rapidly to become a dominant element in the university, their first schools were not opened until 1229–30, and they seem to have come in the first instance simply because Oxford was one of the largest towns in England, with a substantial urban population likely to be receptive to their mission. The Oxford friars were remarkably successful and attracted numerous new recruits to their orders; both rapidly outgrew their original sites, and built large priories on the south-west of the town.

Although the terms of the Papal Legate's settlement imposed severe conditions on the town, there is no doubt that the townspeople benefited from the presence of the masters and scholars (see Catto ed. 1984 Chapter 4, and Highfield 1984 for detail). The university was a growing market for the products and services of the townspeople, and the town's private and corporate landlords profited from letting property. Rooms and houses were let out both as individual lodgings for students, and as halls under the control of masters. Oseney Abbey and the Hospital of St John (which otherwise had little to do with the university) let out more than 30 halls between them, and Oseney also let out property for use as schools, or lecture rooms. By the 1250s, Oseney's houses in Schools Street seem to have been used by masters for holding public lectures. However, the relationship was not always amicable, and the settlement of 1214 was followed by a century and a half of intermittent violence between the town and the university, the main sources of friction being the university's increasing control of the market and

the renting of houses, and the jurisdiction of the Chancellor's court.

After the middle of the 13th century, the town's fortunes seem to have waned and in the 14th century there is clear evidence that areas of housing were abandoned, some of them to be taken over by newly-founded colleges. Over the ensuing centuries Oxford declined into a county town of no more than local significance, interrupted only by a brief period when it served as the royalist base during the early years of the Civil War. The university, however, which had taken root at a time when Oxford could claim to be one of the richest and most important towns in the land, continued to prosper. Despite extensive industrial development connected with the motor industry during the 20th century, the university remains today the principal source of Oxford's prosperity and renown.

EDITOR'S NOTE

As this volume is going to press (in the summer of 2003), new excavations are underway on the site of Oxford Castle, in advance of its redevelopment following the closure of Oxford Prison. These excavations have revealed, on the south side of the castle, traces of a possible rampart and facing wall very similar in form to those seen on the north side of the town, in continuation of the later line of the wall that ran from Westgate towards St George's Tower. The preliminary finds evidence suggests that they could well be of late Saxon date. Much remains to be done, both in terms of further excavation and post-excavation analysis, before this can be regarded as certain. The results will be separately published, but it may be of assistance to readers to be aware that the story of late Saxon Oxford's western defences is already moving on from the position set out in the present volume.

Anne Dodd
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