

UNDER THE ORACLE

**Excavations at the Oracle Shopping Centre site 1996-8:
the medieval and post-medieval urban development
of the Kennet floodplain in Reading**

by

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Front cover image: artist's impression of the Reading Abbey cookhouse on Oracle Site 29 (Peter Lorimer)

Back cover image: E H Buckler's bird's eye view of Reading, 1850

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Contents

List of Figures	viii
List of Plates	xi
List of Tables	xv
Contents of CD-Rom	xvi
Summary	xxiv
Acknowledgements	xxv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
PROJECT LOCATION AND METHODOLOGY	1
HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND	1
Previous excavations	18
THE REPORT	18
Dating	18
Chapter 2: The medieval period	23
INTRODUCTION	23
PROJECT PHASE 1: THE EARLY VALLEY FLOOR AND RIVER CHANNELS	23
SITE 29 (THE ORACLE SITE)	26
Project Phase 2: mid 11th to mid 12th century	26
<i>Quarrying and latrine pits on the Minster Street frontage</i>	26
<i>The first timber structures</i>	28
<i>Building 5830: a major timber-framed building</i>	30
<i>The first stone buildings</i>	33
<i>Construction of Building 5825 and the development of Building 5820</i>	33
Project Phase 3: mid 12th to mid 13th century	35
<i>A new stone building, 5840, and associated features</i>	35
<i>Later development of Building 5840</i>	38
Project Phase 4: mid 13th to late 14th century	41
<i>The development of a new large hall and associated features, AD 1270+</i>	41
Project Phase 5: 15th century	48
<i>The abandonment of Building 5860</i>	48
Project Phase 6: 16th century	48
<i>Redevelopment for a new cobbled yard and sandstone house</i>	48
<i>The Tannery/clothiers works, mid 16th century to 1628</i>	49
SITE 150 (THE MINSTER MILL)	57
Project Phase 2: mid 11th to mid 12th century	57
<i>The Minster Mill and the Minster Mill stream</i>	57
Project Phase 3: mid 12th to mid 13th century and Project Phase 4: mid 13th to late 14th century	59
Project Phase 5: 15th century and Project Phase 6: 16th century	59
THE FLOODPLAIN: SITE 12 (THE YIELD HALL) AND SITE 101 (THE BACK BROOK)	59
Site 12: Project Phase 3: mid 12th to mid 13th century	60
<i>The development of Yield Hall Lane frontages: land reclamation, channel management and the establishment of a craft/industrial workshop</i>	60

Site 12: Project Phase 4: mid 13th to late 14th century	65
<i>The tanning complex on site 12</i>	65
<i>The channels and Building 7410</i>	66
Site 12: Project Phase 5: 15th century	69
<i>The Yield Hall Lane frontage</i>	69
<i>Alteration to Building 7410</i>	71
Site 12: Project Phase 6: 16th century	72
<i>The Yield Hall Lane frontage, channel engineering and land reclamation</i>	72
<i>The occupation and use of the area in the first half of the 16th century</i>	75
<i>Mid to late 16th century</i>	76
Site 101: Project Phase 3 and 4: 12th to late 14th century	80
<i>The Back Brook</i>	80
Site 101: Project Phase 5: 15th century	80
<i>Late medieval structures</i>	80
Site 101: Project Phase 6: 1500-1600	82
<i>The cutting of the Back Brook</i>	82
SOUTH OF THE KENNET: SITE 300 (ST GILES MILL)	82
Project Phases 2 and 3: mid 11th to mid 13th century	83
<i>Fragmentary evidence for the first mill structure and its immediate landscape</i>	83
Project Phase 4: mid 13th to late 14th century	84
<i>St Giles Mill: maintenance of the old mill, channel engineering and development on the London Street frontage</i>	84
<i>The new mill: 1308-1600</i>	89
Project Phase 5: 1400-1500	93
<i>Mid 15th century additions to the 14th-century mill</i>	93
Chapter 3: The later development of the site from c 1600 to the present day	95
SITE 29: THE ORACLE WORKHOUSE	95
Project Phase 7: c 1600-1680	95
<i>The decommissioning of the 16th-century tanney or clothiers' works</i>	95
<i>The workhouse</i>	95
<i>The archaeological evidence</i>	99
Project Phases 8: and 9: 1680-1850. The later development of the Oracle Workhouse	103
<i>The remodelling of the Oracle Workhouse c 1680-1710+</i>	103
<i>The archaeological evidence</i>	104
<i>The demise of light industry and limited remodelling at the Oracle, 1750-1850</i>	109
Project Phase 10: 1850-1900: Demolition of the Oracle and other 19th- and 20th-century activity	109
<i>The map evidence</i>	110
<i>The archaeological evidence</i>	110
A 17TH-CENTURY DYEHOUSE: TEST PIT 78	111
Project Phase 7: 1600-1680	111
SITE 150: THE MINSTER MILL	112
Project Phase 7: 1600-1680	112
<i>Millstream revetments</i>	112
Project Phase 8: 1680-1750	116
<i>Construction of the 18th century Minster Mill</i>	116
Project Phase 9: 1750-1850	117
<i>Structural alterations to the Minster Mill</i>	117
Project Phase 10: 1850-1900	118
<i>19th- and 20th-century disuse and demolition of Minster Mill</i>	118

Contents

SITE 12: THE YIELD HALL	118
Project Phase 7: 1600-1680	118
<i>Building 7410</i>	118
<i>Extension of the Yield Hall</i>	119
<i>Alterations and repairs to the Yield Hall</i>	126
Project Phase 8: 1680-1750	126
<i>Buildings 7410/7411</i>	126
<i>Major rebuilding of The Yield Hall</i>	126
Project Phase 9: 1750-1850	129
<i>Industrialisation</i>	129
Project Phase 10: 1850-1900	130
<i>The foundry</i>	130
SITE 101: THE BACK BROOK	133
Project Phase 7: 1600-1680	133
<i>Post-medieval consolidation of revetments and activity on the banks of the Back Brook</i> .	133
Project Phase 8: 1680-1750	135
<i>Late 17th- and 18th-century revetments</i>	135
Project Phase 9: 1750-1850	135
<i>19th-century flooding and reclamation and consolidation of revetments</i>	135
Project Phase 10: 1850-1900	135
<i>Silting up of the Back Brook and construction on the land</i>	135
SOUTH OF THE KENNET: SITE 300 (ST GILES MILL)	136
Project Phase 7: 1600-1680	136
<i>Demolition of the medieval mill and construction of the new mill</i>	136
Project Phase 8: 1680-1750	139
<i>Construction of a water-pumping mill</i>	139
Project Phase 9: 1750-1850	140
<i>Major expansion of St Giles Mill c AD 1755</i>	140
<i>Early 19th century (1815) maintenance of the mid 18th-century mill</i>	147
Project Phase 10: 1850-1900	147
<i>Modifications to facilitate the conversion to steam power</i>	147
<i>Demolition of the mill and the construction of the tram depot, 1901-present</i>	148
Chapter 4: Documentary evidence <i>by Joan Dils</i>	155
SYNOPSIS	155
THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE AREA	155
THE AREA BEFORE 1700	155
<i>The Yield Hall and its surroundings</i>	155
<i>Minster Street and the Oracle</i>	156
<i>Minster Mill and St Giles Mill</i>	157
1700 TO THE 20TH CENTURY	158
<i>The Yield Hall and its surroundings</i>	158
<i>Minster Street and the Oracle</i>	158
<i>Minster Mill and St Giles Mill</i>	158
SOURCES	159
Chapter 5: Trade, craft and industry	161
TRADED GOODS AND SOURCES OF SUPPLY	161
<i>Jettons and trading tokens identifications by Martin Allen, discussion by Edmund Simons</i>	161
<i>Three tradesmen's tokens</i>	163

Medieval pottery by Paul Blinkhorn	163
<i>Fabrics</i>	164
<i>Discussion</i>	167
Post-medieval pottery by Duncan H Brown and Robert Thomson	178
Glass vessels by Hugh Willmott	185
<i>Introduction</i>	185
<i>Glass as an indicator of trade and exchange</i>	185
Timber by Dan Miles	191
<i>Historic woodland management in Berkshire and Oxfordshire</i>	191
<i>Interpretation of dendrochronological results</i>	192
Animal, bird, fish and plant resources <i>Animal, bird and fish bone</i> by Naomi Sykes, <i>plants</i> by Ruth Pelling	193
THE CRAFTS OF READING	196
Clothmaking by Ruth Shaffrey (with contributions by Leigh Allen, Joan Dils, Penelope Walton Rogers)	196
<i>Introduction</i>	196
<i>Archaeological and documentary background</i>	196
<i>The Oracle excavations</i>	196
<i>Textiles</i> by Penelope Walton Rogers	197
Tanning and leather working by Ruth Shaffrey and Quita Mould (with contributions by Leigh Allen, Joan Dils, Ruth Pelling, Ian Scott, Naomi Sykes and Penelope Walton Rogers)	198
<i>Introduction</i>	198
<i>Documentary and archaeological background</i>	199
<i>Tanning and leather processing</i>	200
<i>Leatherworking</i> by Quita Mould	202
The clay tobacco pipe industry in Reading by David Higgins	221
<i>Bowl form typology</i>	222
<i>Decorated and modified pipes</i>	223
<i>Manufacturing and finishing techniques</i>	223
<i>Marked pipes</i>	223
Other crafts, industries and activities on the floodplain (with contributions from Leigh Allen, Steven J Allen, Cecily Cropper, Roger Doonan, Ruth Shaffrey and Ian Scott)	235
<i>Trades at the Oracle and the Yield Hall: the evidence from small finds</i>	235
<i>Metalworking</i>	261
<i>Brewing</i>	262
<i>Fishing, fowling and poultry keeping</i>	262
MILLS AND MILLING by Ben Ford (with contributions from Steven J Allen, Ruth Shaffrey and Fiona Roe)	262
<i>Introduction</i>	262
Medieval mills and milling in Reading	263
<i>Water supply</i>	263
<i>The mill races and waterwheel</i>	264
<i>The operation of the mill</i>	265
<i>The form and function of the medieval mills at Reading</i>	266
<i>Millstones</i> by Ruth Shaffrey and Fiona Roe	267
<i>Watermill machinery and fittings from the excavations</i> by Steven J Allen	268
Millwrights and mill carpentry	275
<i>Structures</i>	275
Rebuilding	275
Repair	277
Increasing productivity and changing methods of power generation	277

Chapter 6: Discussion of the evidence	279
THE FLOODPLAIN: FROM MEADOW TO INDUSTRIAL QUARTER, A NEW MODEL FOR WATERSIDE DEVELOPMENT <i>by Ben Ford</i>	279
Introduction	279
THE ORACLE EXCAVATIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF READING <i>by Anne Dodd and Ben Ford</i>	280
Reading: the origins of a medieval small town to c 1150	281
<i>The late Saxon town</i>	281
<i>The late 11th and early 12th centuries</i>	281
<i>The early to mid 12th century</i>	282
The developing town: c 1150-1400	284
<i>Streets and tenements</i>	284
<i>La Kychene</i>	284
<i>The Kennet valley floor</i>	287
<i>The economy of the medieval town</i>	288
Reading in the 15th and 16th centuries	291
<i>La Kychene</i>	291
<i>Occupation within the town during the 15th century</i>	291
<i>The floodplain during the 15th century</i>	291
The 16th century	292
<i>The tannery on Site 29</i>	292
<i>A major development of the floodplain</i>	293
<i>The economy of Reading in the 15th and 16th centuries</i>	294
Project Phase 7: c 1600-1680	295
Project Phase 8: c 1680-1750	297
The industrial period: Project Phases 9 and 10 c 1750-1900	297
Bibliography	299
Index	309

List of Figures

Chapter 1

Figure 1.1	National, regional and local location of the Oracle site, Reading	3
Figure 1.2	The Oracle site located within the modern town centre (prior to the Oracle redevelopment) and modern topography, showing the conjectured medieval town limits after Astill 1978.	4
Figure 1.3	Detailed plan of the project area showing the locations of all area excavations, evaluation trenches, and watching brief observations	6-7

Chapter 2

Figure 2.1	Conjectural plan of the floodplain water regime prior to evidence for human activity, with location of the principal area excavations and cross-section A-B, Fig. 2.2 (Project Phase 1)	24
Figure 2.2	Conjectural north – south cross-section A-B through the floodplain within the project area	25
Figure 2.3	Site 29: Plan of quarrying and latrine pits, showing sections above (Project Phase 2)	27
Figure 2.4	Site 29: Plan showing occupation activity with contemporary ceramic cooking vessel and stone lamp (St. 815) below (Project Phase 2)	29
Figure 2.5	Site 29: Plan of Building 5830 (Project Phase 2)	31
Figure 2.6	Site 29: Plan of Buildings 5820 and 5825 (Project Phase 2)	34
Figure 2.7	Site 29: Plan of Buildings 5820 and 5840 and cess pits (Project Phase 3)	36
Figure 2.8	Site 29: Plan of Building 5860 (Project Phase 4)	42
Figure 2.9	Site 29: Plan of Building 5835, re-building in the 16th century (Project Phase 6)	49
Figure 2.10	Site 29: Plan showing the development of the tannery / clothiers' works during the 16th and early 17th century (Project Phase 6)	53
Figure 2.11	Site 150 and other test pits: Showing evidence for the Minster Mill and Minster Mill Stream (Project Phase 2)	56
Figure 2.12	Test Pit 119: NE facing section 241, showing the full sequence of development of the north bank of the Minster Mill Stream	57
Figure 2.13	Site 12: Showing the Minster Mill bypass channel (9269) and channel (9549) in relation to the reclaimed land; Site 101: the earliest revetment structures for the Back Brook (Project Phase 3)	61
Figure 2.14	Site 12: Recut of channel (9149) and the construction and use of Building 7410 and other structures on the reclaimed land in the late 12th to early 13th century	62
Figure 2.15	Site 12: South facing section 676, showing sequence of development for channel 9149	63
Figure 2.16	Site 12: Plan of the tannery / tawery (Project Phase 4)	66
Figure 2.17	Site 12: Showing the rebuilding of Building 7410 (Project Phase 4 - 5)	68
Figure 2.18	Site 12: Realignment and revetting of channels and extension to Building 7410; Site 101: late 15th-century revetment A of the Back Brook (Project Phase 5)	70
Figure 2.19	Site 12: Plan showing the early-mid 16th-century redevelopment of the area, with new channels and primary phase of the Yield Hall; Site 101: revetment of the Back Brook (Project Phase 6)	73
Figure 2.20	Site 12: Later 16th-century extensions to the Yield Hall, and modifications to Buildings 7410/7411 (Project Phase 6)	77
Figure 2.21	Site 101: South facing section 307 showing construction of Back Brook revetment A	81
Figure 2.22	Site 300 and neighbouring test pits: Showing the mill features of the 12th and 13th century (Project Phases 2 - 4)	86

List of Figures

Figure 2.23	Site 300, St Giles Mill: Detailed plan of structural foundation timbers of the early 14th-century mill (Project Phase 4) and later additions (Project Phase 5)	88
Figure 2.24	Site 300, St Giles Mill: Details of timber joints in the foundation timbers of the 14th-century mill (Project Phase 4)	91
Chapter 3		
Figure 3.1	Site 29: Plan showing the 19th- and 20th-century archaeological features, and standing buildings on the site at the time of the excavations in 1997	100
Figure 3.2	Site 28 Test Pit 78: Plan of features related to the dyehouse (Project Phase 7)	110
Figure 3.3	Site 28 Test Pit 78: SE facing section 236, showing timber-lined drainage channel 8066	112
Figure 3.4	Site 150: 17th-century revetment of the Minster Mill Stream (Project Phase 7)	113
Figure 3.5	Site 150: The archaeological evidence for the Minster Mill, 17th to 19th centuries (Project Phases 7 - 9)	144
Figure 3.6	Site 12: Extension of the Yield Hall and Buildings 7410/7411, 1600-1680 (Project Phase 7)	119
Figure 3.7	Site 12: Alterations to the Yield Hall during the second half of the 17th century; Site 101, 17th-century brick infill reinforcement of the 16th-century timber revetment on the north bank of the Back Brook, with wooden platform 7270 on the south bank (Project Phase 7)	124
Figure 3.8	Site 12: Late 17th-century repairs to the Yield Hall; Site 101, brick surface 7122 on the south bank of the Back Brook (Project Phase 7)	125
Figure 3.9	Site 12: Rebuilding of the Yield Hall during the early 18th century (Project Phase 8) . .	127
Figure 3.10	Site 101: Section 305 along the north bank of the Back Brook showing the ongoing brick reinforcement of the timber revetment (Project Phases 7 and 8)	134
Figure 3.11	Site 300, St Giles Mill: Excavated remains of the mill as rebuilt c 1750 with the Board of Health map 1853 for comparison (Project Phase 9)	141
Figure 3.12	Site 300, St Giles Mill: Detail of the steam-powered mill from the Goad Insurance map of 1895 compared with the archaeological evidence (Project Phase 10)	148
Figure 3.13	Site 300, St Giles Mill: Excavated remains of the Reading Corporation Tramways Depot and indicated on plan of the Tramways buildings from 1935 (Project Phase 10)	151
Figure 3.14	Simplified composite section showing relative levels of medieval and post-medieval mill races and associated channels	152
Chapter 5		
Figure 5.1	Medieval pottery: early / mid Saxon (No.1) and local fine sandy wares (Nos 2-7)	171
Figure 5.2	Medieval pottery: Newbury coarsewares (Nos 8-10) and Medieval Oxford ware (Nos 11-15)	172
Figure 5.3	Medieval pottery: Ashampstead ware (Nos 16-21) and London ware (Nos 22-31)	174
Figure 5.4	Medieval pottery: 'Tudor Green' ware (Nos 32-35), Cistercian ware (Nos 36-40) and Martincamp white ware (No.41)	175
Figure 5.5	Medieval pottery: Surrey whiteware (Nos 42-49)	176
Figure 5.6	Medieval pottery: Surrey whiteware (Nos 50-53)	177
Figure 5.7	Post-medieval pottery (Nos 1-5)	181
Figure 5.8	Post-medieval pottery (Nos 6-10)	182
Figure 5.9	Post-medieval pottery (Nos 11-16)	183
Figure 5.10	Post-medieval pottery (Nos 17-24)	184
Figure 5.11	Vessel glass from site 12 (Nos GL1-GL22)	187
Figure 5.12	Vessel glass from site 29 (Nos GL49-GL63)	189
Figure 5.13	Vessel glass from site 29 (Nos GL64-GL76)	190
Figure 5.14	Leather: Shoe construction methods	203
Figure 5.15	Leather: Later medieval shoe types	204
Figure 5.16	Leather: Later medieval shoe types continued	205
Figure 5.17	Leather: 16th-century shoe types	206

Figure 5.18	Leather: 18th- and 19th-century footwear types	207
Figure 5.19	Leather: Shoes (Nos 1-4)	212
Figure 5.20	Leather: Shoes (Nos 5-8)	214
Figure 5.21	Leather: Shoes and pattens (Nos 9-13)	215
Figure 5.22	Leather: Sandal and shoes (Nos 14-16)	217
Figure 5.23	Leather: Shoe, straps, border and panels (Nos 17-25)	218
Figure 5.24	Leather: Sheet leather (Nos 26-28)	219
Figure 5.25	Leather: Sheet leather and driving-belt junction (Nos 29-31)	220
Figure 5.26	Clay tobacco pipes: Spur forms (Nos S1-S18) and heel forms (Nos H1-H3)	225
Figure 5.27	Clay tobacco pipes: Heel forms (Nos H4-H23)	227
Figure 5.28	Clay tobacco pipes: Heel forms (Nos H24-H35), other pipes (Nos 1-10)	229
Figure 5.29	Clay tobacco pipes: Pipes (Nos 11-30)	231
Figure 5.30	Clay tobacco pipes: Pipes (Nos 31-50)	233
Figure 5.31	Clay tobacco pipes: Pipes (Nos 51-69)	234
Figure 5.32	Lead objects (Nos 1-5)	238
Figure 5.33	Copper alloy: buckles and belt/strap fittings (Nos 1-12)	239
Figure 5.34	Copper alloy: pins, lace tag and purse frames (Nos 13-20)	240
Figure 5.35	Copper alloy: clasps, thimbles and various objects (Nos 21-28)	242
Figure 5.36	Iron: Arms, accessories and tools (Nos 1, 4-6, 9, 15)	243
Figure 5.37	Iron: Tools (Nos 17, 19-21, 26-28, 44)	244
Figure 5.38	Iron: Industrial machinery and tools (Nos 45-48, 55, 57)	245
Figure 5.39	Iron: Forked socketed object (No. 62)	246
Figure 5.40	Iron: Forked socketed object (No. 63)	248
Figure 5.41	Iron: Object of uncertain function (No. 59) and horse and riding gear (Nos 73-75, 80-81)	249
Figure 5.42	Iron: Spurs (Nos 82-84, 86-89)	250
Figure 5.43	Iron: Riding and horse gear (Nos 92-95)	252
Figure 5.44	Iron: Cast iron lion head plaques (No. 132)	253
Figure 5.45	Iron: Knives (Nos 154-58, 162-63)	254
Figure 5.46	Iron: Knives (Nos 164, 166-67, 176-78, 180)	255
Figure 5.47	Iron: Knives (Nos 184-85, 187-88, 190)	257
Figure 5.48	Iron: Personal items keys and hinges (Nos 228, 237, 240-45, 256, 258)	258
Figure 5.49	Worked stone (Nos 1-5)	259
Figure 5.50	Wooden objects (Nos 1-9)	260
Figure 5.51	Structural timber, watermill machinery and fittings: Ring of a cog- or pitwheel (No. 12); the machinery of an early vertical watermill showing the components recovered in excavations at St Giles Mill (after Watts 2002)	270
Figure 5.52	Structural timber, watermill machinery and fittings: Part of the disc or roundel from a lantern pinion (No. 13)	271
Figure 5.53	Structural timber, watermill machinery and fittings: Starts and floats (Nos 14-17)	272
Figure 5.54	Structural timber, watermill machinery and fittings: Possible float from waterwheel (No. 18)	273
Figure 5.55	Structural timber, watermill machinery and fittings: Possible shutter, hatch or sluice gate fragment (No. 19) and possible float (No. 20)	274
Figure 5.56	St Giles Mill: Longitudinal section through all phases of water race	276
 Chapter 6		
Figure 6.1	Reconstruction of Building 5860	286

List of Plates

Chapter 1

Plate 1.1	General view of the project area	2
Plate 1.2	The project area shown on a detail of Amyce's survey of 1552	8
Plate 1.3	John Speed's map of Reading, 1611	9
Plate 1.4	John Rocque's map of Reading, 1761	10
Plate 1.5	The project area shown on a detail of Charles Tomkins' map of Reading, 1802	11
Plate 1.6	The project area shown on a detail of the Board of Health map, 1853	12
Plate 1.7	E H Buckler's bird's-eye view of Reading from the water tower, c 1850	13
Plate 1.8	The project area shown on a detail of the Goad insurance map, 1895	14-15
Plate 1.9	The project area shown on a detail of the 25 inch:1 mile Ordnance Survey map of 1909-10	17

Chapter 2

Plate 2.1	Site 29: view looking W of quarry pits at the base of the medieval sequence (Project Phase 1)	28
Plate 2.2	Site 29: circular indentation in hearth 6882 where a large cooking vessel had stood (Project Phase 2)	30
Plate 2.3	Site 29: view looking NE of partially revealed internal floor 6501 with hearth within Building 5830 (Project Phase 2)	32
Plate 2.4	Site 29: view looking SW of the heavily fire-scorched hearth area within Building 5820 (Project Phase 2)	33
Plate 2.5	Site 29: view looking S with Building 5840 in the mid-ground and the Holy Brook in the background	35
Plate 2.6	Site 29: view looking N showing detail of the foundations and footings at the south-east corner of Building 5840 (Project Phase 3)	37
Plate 2.7	Site 29: view looking N of partially excavated stone-lined cess pit 11294 (Project Phase 3)	38
Plate 2.8	Site 29: detail of central hearth 6117 from Building 5840 (Project Phase 3)	39
Plate 2.9	Site 29: details of oven construction: (i) looking NE showing oven 6004 in Building 5840 and (ii) looking N showing oven 5953 in Building 5820 (Project Phase 3)	40
Plate 2.10	Site 29: view looking SW showing Building 5860 (Project Phase 4)	43
Plate 2.11	Site 29: view looking N showing detail of timber revetment, Structure 5422 (Project Phase 4)	43
Plate 2.12	Site 29: Building 5860: view looking NW showing the substantial and partially robbed foundations of the buttressed north wall 5778 (Project Phase 4)	44
Plate 2.13	Site 29: view looking SE showing timber foundation piles underlying the footings of the southern wall of Building 5860 (Project Phase 4)	45
Plate 2.14	Site 29: view looking SW showing the unusual method of setting stones and tiles on the diagonal in the footings of the southern wall of Building 5860 (Project Phase 4)	45
Plate 2.15	Site 29: details of hearths in the eastern end of Building 5860 (Project Phase 4)	47
Plate 2.16	Site 29: view looking SW showing the heavily truncated remains (4594/5303) of early 16th-century Building 5835 (Project Phase 6)	50
Plate 2.17	Site 29: the dyeing/tanning complex (Project Phase 6)	51
Plate 2.18	Site 29: view looking NW of clay-lined tank 4817 (Project Phase 6)	52
Plate 2.19	Site 29: view looking NW showing the remains of the square furnace house or drying room, structure 5186 (Project Phase 6)	54
Plate 2.20	Site 29: general view looking SW of the dyeing/tanning complex under excavation (Project Phase 6)	55
Plate 2.21	Site 29: view looking S of the 17th-century cobbled courtyard surface of the Oracle workhouse slumping into the compressed fills of a decommissioned and backfilled barrel from the tannery/dyeing complex	55

Plate 2.22	Site 150 Test Pit 167: general view looking NE showing multiple resurfacing of the lane leading from Minster Street (left) to the Minster Mill (right) (Project Phases 2 – 8)	58
Plate 2.23	Site 12: view looking SE of successive revetments on the eastern bank of channel 9549/9149 (Project Phase 3)	60
Plate 2.24	Site 12: view looking S across Building 7410 with tank or vat bases 7401 (foreground) and 7402 (background), charcoal-rich deposit 9675 in between them and wall 9666 to the right (Project Phase 3)	64
Plate 2.25	Site 12, Building 7410: view looking SW of detail of tank or vat base 7402 (Project Phase 3)	64
Plate 2.26	Site 12: view looking NE showing sondage through tanning pit 8742 (foreground) revealing post and plank revetment 8957 (Project Phase 4).	67
Plate 2.27	Site 12: view looking E with chalk bank 9497 in the foreground abutting wall 9665 behind (Project Phase 4)	69
Plate 2.28	Site 12: view looking E showing fish trap 8988 built across channel 8633 (Project Phase 5)	71
Plate 2.29	Site 12: view looking W showing revetment 9864 marking the banks of channel 8825 near its confluence with the Back Brook	72
Plate 2.30	Site 12: view looking NE of revetment 9103 marking the eastern bank of channel 8634 (Project Phase 6)	74
Plate 2.31	Site 12: view looking S of a timber fish trap built across the new channel (8634) (Project Phase 6)	75
Plate 2.32	Site 12, Building 7411: view looking W of wall 9482 showing the mixture of building materials used (Project Phase 6)	76
Plate 2.33	Site 12: view looking NW showing the remains of fireplace 2821 added to Room 3 of the Yield Hall (Project Phase 6)	78
Plate 2.34	Site 12: view looking W showing partially excavated hearth/vat base 9391 in Building 7410 (Project Phase 6)	79
Plate 2.35	Site 101: view looking NE of 16th-century revetments of the northern bank of the Back Brook (Project Phase 6)	82
Plate 2.36	Site 300: view looking SW of the fully excavated remains of (i) complete pit wheel 13385, with (ii) a detail showing the joint between two of its felloes (Project Phase 2)	84
Plate 2.37	Site 300, Test Pit 302: view looking SE of the plant matting placed to consolidate the south bank of the mill tail (Project Phase 2)	85
Plate 2.38	Site 300: view looking S of post and plank revetment 13906 of the southern bank of the bypass channel; the timbers were tree-ring dated to AD 1278 or after (Project Phase 4)	87
Plate 2.39	Site 300: view looking NE showing oak chip waste lying on the chalk foundation deposit (Project Phase 4)	90
Plate 2.40	Site 300: general view looking SW of the foundation frame of the early 14th-century St. Giles Mill (Project Phase 4)	90
Plate 2.41	Site 300: view looking SW showing the slots and jointing in beam 13204 (Project Phase 4)	91
Plate 2.42	Site 300: view looking NW of beam 13423 showing vacant mortices for vertical posts and in-situ planking (Project Phase 4)	92
 Chapter 3		
Plate 3.1	Reading Corporation Terrier of 1807 showing the Oracle workhouse, with the location of the excavated remains superimposed	96
Plate 3.2	Calotype by William Henry Fox-Talbot of the Oracle workhouse entrance, Gun St, in the 1840s	97
Plate 3.3	A detail from the E H Buckler view of Reading, looking north-west (see Plate 1.7)	98
Plate 3.4	'The Oracle and Minster St 1628', an artist's impression looking NE	98
Plate 3.5	Site 29 the Oracle: view looking SE of the saw pits (Project Phase 7)	99
Plate 3.6	Site 29: view looking NW of cellar 4575 in the east range of the workhouse (Project Phase 7)	101

List of Plates

Plate 3.7	Site 29 the Oracle: view looking SE along drain 3852 (Project Phase 7)	101
Plate 3.8	Site 29 the Oracle: view looking SW at original brick bridge 6015 which carried the western range of the workhouse over the Holy Brook (Project Phase 7)	102
Plate 3.9	Site 29: view looking SW at the west wall (3967) of the west range of the workhouse (Project Phase 7)	103
Plate 3.10	Site 29 the Oracle: view looking NW along the main NW-SE pathway in the Oracle Courtyard (Group 3846) (Project Phase 8)	104
Plate 3.11	Site 29 the Oracle: view looking SW showing the backfilling in the cellar in the east range of the workhouse (Project Phase 8)	105
Plate 3.12	Site 29 the Oracle: a maiolica tile from the backfill to the eastern cellar (Project Phase 8)	105
Plate 3.13	Site 29 the Oracle: vertical view of the furnace (Project Phase 8)	106
Plate 3.14	Site 29 the Oracle: view looking E showing material dumped into the cellar (3967) in the west range of the workhouse (Project Phase 8)	107
Plate 3.15	Site 29 the Oracle: view looking NW at a detail of demolished or collapsed work- house wall and ceiling plaster showing the impressions of laths (Project Phase 8)	107
Plate 3.16	Site 29 the Oracle: fire places: (i) view looking SW at the western fireplace 3721 and (ii) looking NE at the eastern fireplace 3775 (Project Phase 10)	108
Plate 3.17	Site 29 the Oracle: view looking NW of herringbone brick floor 3812 (Project Phase 10)	109
Plate 3.18	Site 78: view looking SE showing the construction detail of the eastern dyeing vat pit 8053 (Project Phase 7)	111
Plate 3.19	Site 150 Minster Mill: view looking NE of the wooden platform in Test Pit 135 (Project Phase 7)	115
Plate 3.20	Site 150 Minster Mill: a general view looking N of the 18th-century remains (Project Phase 8)	116
Plate 3.21	Site 150 Minster Mill: view looking E showing detail of the 18th-century penstock (Project Phase 8)	117
Plate 3.22	Site 12 the Yield Hall: view looking E showing a deposit of horncores (Project Phase 7)	120
Plate 3.23	Site 12: the Yield Hall, view looking SE showing the addition of Room 5 (Project Phase 7)	120
Plate 3.24	Site 12: the Yield Hall view looking NE of brick wall 705 forming west wall of Room 5 (Project Phase 7)	121
Plate 3.25	Site 12: the Yield Hall, view looking NW showing mortar bedding layer with the impressions of ceramic tiles or bricks for floor 716 in Room 4 (Project Phase 7)	121
Plate 3.26	Site 12: the Yield Hall (i) above, view looking NE showing cellar 967 with a later brick reflooring, and (ii) below, with original flooring of reused ceramic rooftiles (Project Phase 7)	122
Plate 3.27	Site 12: the Yield Hall, some of the bottles from cellar 967 (Project Phase 7)	123
Plate 3.28	Site 12: the Yield Hall, general view looking W (Project Phase 8)	128
Plate 3.29	Site 12: the Yield Hall: view looking NW showing the problems of subsidence affecting two phases of walls (Project Phase 8)	128
Plate 3.30	Plan of The Yield Hall in a Reading Corporation Terrier of 1807	130
Plate 3.31	Site 12: the Yield Hall, view looking NW showing a ceramic vessel set into surface 646 (Project Phase 10)	131
Plate 3.32	Site 12: the Yield Hall (i) the southern and eastern elevations of the Yield Hall, shortly before demolition in 1935 and (ii) a view of the internal staircase	132
Plate 3.33	Site 101: the Back Brook, view looking NW showing the well-built brick surface 7122 constructed on the southern bank of the Back Brook (Project Phase 7)	133
Plate 3.34	Site 300 St Giles Mill: view looking SE showing the exposed 17th-century elm plank deck of the head race (13713) (Project Phase 7)	136
Plate 3.35	Site 300 St Giles Mill: view looking NW showing ground beams 13467, 12057, 13476 overlying the early 14th-century mill timbers (Project Phase 7)	137
Plate 3.36	Site 300 St Giles Mill: photograph looking SW of the east elevation of the mill taken c 1900; on the left is the 17th-century mill, with the more substantial buildings of the 18th-century rebuild to the right (Project Phase 7)	138

Plate 3.37	Site 300 St Giles Mill: detail of Speed's map (Plate 1.3) showing the 17th-century St Giles Mill (Project Phase 7)	138
Plate 3.38	Plan of the property and building layout of the water pumping mill shown on a lease of 1697	139
Plate 3.39	Photograph looking NW along Mill Lane showing the water pumping mill towards the centre of the photograph, immediately behind the tree, view c 1900	140
Plate 3.40	Site 300 St Giles Mill, photograph looking NE of the south-west elevation of the mill taken around 1900	142
Plate 3.41	Site 300 St Giles Mill: view looking SW showing a section through the central mill channel and retaining wall upstream from the mill (Project Phase 9)	143
Plate 3.42	Site 300 St Giles Mill: view looking SE showing the curved floor of the wheel race in the northern channel (Project Phase 9)	143
Plate 3.43	Site 300 St Giles Mill: view looking SW of the timber lattice framework for the races in the northern channel (Project Phase 9)	144
Plate 3.44	Site 300 St Giles Mill: view looking NW showing the mill tail revetment structure as seen in Test Pit 362 (Project Phase 9)	144
Plate 3.45	Site 300 St Giles Mill: view looking SE showing a section through multiple phases of head-race structure the latest of which formed a silt trap (Project Phase 9 - also see Plate 3.34)	145
Plate 3.46	Site 300 St Giles Mill: view looking N showing the vacant mortice for one of the posts for the Hurst frame (Project Phase 9)	146
Plate 3.47	Site 300 St Giles Mill view looking SW showing the southern race (Project Phase 9)	147
Plate 3.48	View looking W of the opening ceremony of the Tramways Depot in 1901	149
Plate 3.49	View looking W of Reading Bus Depot immediately prior to demolition	149
Plate 3.50	Reading Bus Depot, general internal views (i) and (ii)	150
Plate 3.51	Site 300 view looking N, the remaining unexcavated mill timbers of St Giles Mill are preserved <i>in situ</i>	153
 Chapter 5		
Plate 5.1	Tokens	163
Plate 5.2	Draw wire 'sewing' pins	236
Plate 5.3	'Two Water Mills and an Open Sluice', Jacob van Ruisdael, 1653	236

List of Tables

Table 1.1	Summary of project chronology	19-20
Table 5.1	Medieval and Tudor coins and jettons	162
Table 5.2	Medieval pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds and EVE per phase	163
Table 5.3	Medieval pottery occurrence per phase by fabric types	168
Table 5.4	Medieval pottery vessel occurrence per phase	169
Table 5.5	Post-medieval pottery, quantities of ware types by project phase	179
Table 5.6	Skeletal representation data, by phase, for caprines from site 29	194
Table 5.7	Skeletal representation data for cattle and caprines from selected features on site 29	195

Contents of CD-Rom

The full specialist reports are presented on the CD. Digital Chapter 7 contains the full medieval and post-medieval pottery reports. Digital Chapter 8 contains the full reports on architectural stone, window glass, brick, and other ceramic building materials. Digital Chapter 9 contains the reports on coins and jettons, tools and household objects,

including metal finds, worked bone, worked stone, vessel glass, clay tobacco pipes and leather and textiles, and wooden objects. Digital Chapter 10 comprises the full reports on the animal remains and marine shell. Digital Chapter 11 has the full reports on plant remains and dendro-chronology.

Chapter 7: Pottery

MEDIEVAL POTTERY *by Paul Blinkhorn*

- Introduction**
- Analytical methodology**
- Fabrics**
- Chronology**
- Fragmentation analysis**
- Cross-fits**
- Spatial analysis and discussion**
- Vessel types**

POST-MEDIEVAL POTTERY *by Duncan H Brown and Robert Thomson*

- Methodology**
- Catalogue of Fabrics and Forms**
- Chronology**
- Sites**
- Discussion**
- Catalogue of illustrated post-medieval pottery**

Chapter 8: Building Materials

ARCHITECTURAL STONE *by Jamie Preston*

- Introduction**
- Project Phase 4: mid 13th to late 14th century**
- Project Phase 6: c 1500 – c 1600**
- Project Phase 7: 1600 - 1680**
- Project Phase 8: 1680 - 1750**
- Project Phase 10a: 1850 - 1900**
- Test Pits 301, 302, 303 and 304**
- Demolition and re-use of building materials in Reading**
- Catalogue of architectural stone fragments**

BRICK *by Terence Paul Smith*

- Introduction: fabrics**
- Early Flemish type bricks (Project Phase 6)**
- Red bricks of pre-19th-century date**
- Large-format bricks of 19th-century date**
- Red brick special of 19th-century date**
- Conclusion**

STRUCTURAL TIMBER *by Steven J Allen*

Introduction
Structural timbers
Watermill machinery and fittings
The small finds: pegs and building fittings
Summary and conclusions

WINDOW GLASS *by Hugh Willmott*

Site 12
Site 29
Catalogue of painted window glass

CERAMIC BUILDING MATERIAL *by Alan Vince and Kate Steane*

Introduction
Site 12
Site 29
Site 300

Chapter 9: Coins, tools and house hold objects

COINS, TOKENS AND JETTONS *by Martin Allen*

Coin and token list

OBJECTS OF COPPER ALLOY *by Leigh Allen*

Introduction
Discussion
Catalogue

THE IRONWORK *by Ian Scott*

Introduction
Composition and dating of the ironwork assemblages
The Yield Hall (site 12)
The Oracle (site 29)
St Giles Mill (site 300)
Catalogue

LEAD OBJECTS (based on identifications *by Cecily Cropper)*

Site 29 (the Oracle)
Site 12 (the Yield Hall)
Site 101 (the Back Brook)
Site 28 (Test Pit 78: the dyehouse)
Other lead finds

WORKED BONE OBJECTS *by Leigh Allen*

Site 29 (the Oracle)
Site 12 (the Yield Hall)
Site 300 (St Giles Mill)
Evaluation (REOR 96)
Catalogue of the worked bone objects by function

VESSEL GLASS *by Hugh Willmott*

Introduction
Site 12 (the Yield Hall)
Site 29 (the Oracle)
Catalogue of vessel glass

WORKED STONE *by Ruth Shaffrey*

The Millstones *by Ruth Shaffrey and Fiona Roe*
Other worked stone
Catalogue of worked stone

CLAY TOBACCO PIPES *by David Higgins*

- Introduction**
- Methodology**
- The clay tobacco pipes**
- Decorated and modified pipes**
- Manufacturing and finishing techniques**
- The marked pipes**
- Conclusions**
- Catalogue of illustrated pipes**
- WOODEN OBJECTS** *by Steven J Allen*
 - Wooden vessels**
 - Tools**
 - Other**
 - Catalogue**
- TEXTILES AND ANIMAL FIBRES** *by Penelope Walton Rogers*
 - Textiles**
 - Animal fibres**
 - Catalogue**
- LEATHER** *by Quita Mould*
 - Introduction**
 - Footwear**
 - Straps**
 - Other leather objects**
 - Sheet leather**
 - Leather associated with machinery**
 - Waste leather**
 - Catalogue of illustrated leather**
- METALWORKING** *based on Post-excavation Assessment report by Roger Doonan*
 - Site 29 The Oracle Project Phase 8**
 - Site 12 The Yield Hall Project Phase 6**
 - Site 22 The George Hotel**

Chapter 10: Animal bone and marine shell

- THE ANIMAL REMAINS FROM READING ORACLE SITES 12 AND 29** *by Naomi Sykes*
 - Introduction**
 - Methods**
 - Taphonomy**
 - Taxa representation**
 - Relative frequencies of main domesticates**
 - Ageing data**
 - Sexing**
 - Skeletal representation**
 - Carcass processing**
 - Animal size and conformation**
 - Pathology**
 - Discussion**
- MARINE SHELL** *by Sarah F Wyles and Jessica Winder*
 - Oysters**
 - Other marine shell**
 - The mussel dump (pit 4566)**
 - Concluding comment**

Chapter 11: Environmental evidence and dendrochronology

THE PLANT REMAINS *by Ruth Pelling*

Introduction

Processing and analytical methods

Results and interpretation

Discussion

DENDROCHRONOLOGY *by Dan Miles*

Introduction

Methodology and assessment

Preliminary analysis and spot dating

General summary of results arranged by sites

Sourcing of timber

Historic woodland management in Berkshire and Oxfordshire

Interpretation of dendrochronological results

Conclusions

Appendix 1: Concordance of Project Phases and site sub-phases

Appendix 2: Project aims and methodology

List of Figures

Chapter 7

- Figure 7.1 Medieval pottery: early/mid Saxon (No.1) and local fine sandy wares (Nos 2-7)
Figure 7.2 Medieval pottery: Newbury coarsewares (Nos 8-10) and Medieval Oxford ware (Nos 11-15)
Figure 7.3 Medieval pottery: Ashampstead ware (Nos 16-21) and London ware (Nos 22-31)
Figure 7.4 Medieval pottery: 'Tudor Green' ware (Nos 32-35), Cistercian ware (Nos 36-40) and Martincamp white ware (No.41)
Figure 7.5 Medieval pottery: Surrey whiteware (Nos 42-49)
Figure 7.6 Medieval pottery: Surrey whiteware (Nos 50-53)
Figure 7.7 Post-medieval pottery (Nos 1-5)
Figure 7.8 Post-medieval pottery (Nos 6-10)
Figure 7.9 Post-medieval pottery (Nos 11-16)
Figure 7.10 Post-medieval pottery (Nos 17-24)

Chapter 8

- Figure 8.1 Architectural stone: pinnacle (Type No. 4)
Figure 8.2 Architectural stone: hoodmould (Type No. 10)
Figure 8.3 Architectural stone: niche/roundel (Type No. 11) and jamb Type No. 12)
Figure 8.4 Architectural stone: voussoir (Type No. 13)
Figure 8.5 Architectural stone: corbel with heads (Type No. 14)
Figure 8.6 Architectural stone: jamb (Type No. 31)
Figure 8.7 Architectural stone: shaft (Type No. 43)
Figure 8.8 Structural timber Nos 1-6
Figure 8.9 Structural timber Nos 7-11
Figure 8.10 Structural timber, watermill machinery and fittings: Ring of a cog- or pitwheel (No. 12)
Figure 8.11 Structural timber, watermill machinery and fittings: Part of the disc or roundel from a lantern pinion (No. 13)
Figure 8.12 Structural timber, watermill machinery and fittings: Starts and floats (Nos 14-17)
Figure 8.13 Structural timber, watermill machinery and fittings: Possible float from waterwheel (No. 18)
Figure 8.14 Structural timber, watermill machinery and fittings: Possible shutter, hatch or sluice gate fragment (No. 19) and possible float (No. 20)

- Figure 8.15 Structural timber: roofing and carpenter's pegs and building fittings (Nos 21-23)
- Figure 8.16 Window glass (Nos WG1-4)
- Figure 8.17 Window glass (Nos WG6, 8, 10-11)
- Figure 8.18 Tile designs not matched with Slade's typology
- Figure 8.19 Tiles of Slade's types I.1, I.2 and I.3
- Figure 8.20 Tiles of Slade's types I. 4
- Figure 8.21 Tiles of Slade's types I.7 and I.15
- Figure 8.22 Tiles of Slade's types I.16, I.28 and I.33
- Figure 8.23 Comparative widths of tiles on site 29 in different Project Phases

Chapter 9

- Figure 9.1 Copper alloy: buckles and belt/strap fittings (Nos 1-12)
- Figure 9.2 Copper alloy: pins, lace tag and purse frames (Nos 13-20)
- Figure 9.3 Copper alloy: clasps, thimbles and various objects (Nos 21-28)
- Figure 9.4 Iron: Arms, accessories and tools (Nos 1, 4-6, 9, 15)
- Figure 9.5 Iron: Tools (Nos 17, 19-21, 26-28, 44)
- Figure 9.6 Iron: Industrial machinery and tools (Nos 45-48, 55, 57)
- Figure 9.7 Iron: Forked socketed object (No. 62)
- Figure 9.8 Iron: Forked socketed object (No. 63)
- Figure 9.9 Iron: Object of uncertain function (No. 59) and horse and riding gear (Nos 73-75, 80-81)
- Figure 9.10 Iron: Spurs (Nos 82-84, 86-89)
- Figure 9.11 Iron: Riding and horse gear (Nos 92-95)
- Figure 9.12 Iron: Cast iron lion head plaques (No. 132)
- Figure 9.13 Iron: Knives (Nos 154-58, 162-63)
- Figure 9.14 Iron: Knives (Nos 164, 166-68, 176-78, 180)
- Figure 9.15 Iron: knives (Nos 184-85, 187-88, 190)
- Figure 9.16 Iron: Personal items keys and hinges (Nos 228, 237, 240-45, 256, 258)
- Figure 9.17 Lead objects (Nos 1-5)
- Figure 9.18 Summary of site 12 vessel glass
- Figure 9.19 Summary of site 29 vessel glass
- Figure 9.20 Vessel glass from site 12 (Nos GL1-GL22)
- Figure 9.21 Vessel glass from site 29 (Nos GL49-GL63)
- Figure 9.22 Vessel glass from site 29 (Nos GL64-GL76)
- Figure 9.23 Worked stone (Nos 1-5)
- Figure 9.24 Clay tobacco pipes: Spur forms (Nos S1-S18) and heel forms (Nos H1-H3)
- Figure 9.25 Clay tobacco pipes: Heel forms (Nos H4-H23)
- Figure 9.26 Clay tobacco pipes: Heel forms (Nos H24-H35), other pipes (Nos 1-10)
- Figure 9.27 Clay tobacco pipes: Pipes (Nos 11-30)
- Figure 9.28 Clay tobacco pipes: Pipes (Nos 31-50)
- Figure 9.29 Clay tobacco pipes: Pipes (Nos 51-69)
- Figure 9.30 Wooden objects (Nos 1-9)
- Figure 9.31 Leather: seam and stitch conventions used in the illustrations
- Figure 9.32 Leather: shoe terminology
- Figure 9.33 Leather: Shoe construction methods
- Figure 9.34 Leather: Later medieval shoe types
- Figure 9.35 Leather: Later medieval shoe types continued
- Figure 9.36 Leather: 16th-century shoe types
- Figure 9.37 Leather: 18th- and 19th-century footwear types
- Figure 9.38 Leather: Shoes (Nos 1-4)
- Figure 9.39 Leather: Shoes, (Nos 5-8)
- Figure 9.40 Leather: Shoes and pattens, (Nos 9-13)
- Figure 9.41 Leather: Sandal and shoes (Nos 14-16)
- Figure 9.42 Leather: Shoe, straps, border and panels (Nos 17-25)
- Figure 9.43 Leather: Sheet leather (Nos 26-28)
- Figure 9.44 Leather: Sheet leather and driving-belt junction, (Nos 29-31)

Chapter 10

- Figure 10.1 Animal remains: Inter-phase variation in the relative frequency of sheep and goats
Figure 10.2 Animal remains: Metacarpal measurements for cattle
Figure 10.3 Animal remains: Cattle horn-core measurements
Figure 10.4 Animal remains: Scatterplot of horn-core measurements
Figure 10.5 Animal remains: Anatomical representation for Project Phase 6 and 7 cattle from site 29
Figure 10.6 Animal remains: Anatomical representation data for Project Phase 5 and 6 geese from site 12 compared with those from Victoria Road, Winchester
Figure 10.7 Animal remains: Cattle and caprine butchery
Figure 10.8 Animal remains: Butchery of the goose carpometacarpus
Figure 10.9 Animal remains: Inter-phase variation in the proximal breadth of cattle metatarsi
Figure 10.10 Animal remains: Inter-phase variation in cattle wither heights
Figure 10.11 Animal remains: Inter-phase variation in the size of caprine radii
Figure 10.12 Animal remains: Inter-phase size variation in the distal breadth of caprine tibiae
Figure 10.13 Animal remains: Inter-phase variation in caprine wither heights
Figure 10.14 Animal remains: Frontal profile measurements for the Project Phase 6 sheep compared with those of known breed

Chapter 11

- Figure 11.1 Dendrochronology dating: summary of all sites
Figure 11.2 Dendrochronology dating: Site 29 13th century
Figure 11.3 Dendrochronology dating: Sites 29, 12, 101, 78, 28, 150 15th-17th century
Figure 11.4 Dendrochronology dating: Site 300 13th century
Figure 11.5 Dendrochronology dating: Site 300 subphase 3002 construction of new mill
Figure 11.6 Dendrochronology dating: Site 300 subphase 3003 post-medieval timbers

List of Plates

Chapter 8

- Plate 8.1 Tewkesbury Abbey: the north porch doorway
Plate 8.2 St John's, Devizes, showing fret ornament on the arches of two blocked 12th-century windows in the north transept
Plate 8.3 Iffley Church, with lavish chevron decoration
Plate 8.4 Cumnor Church: reset corbels showing a pair of human heads
Plate 8.5 Stanway Church, Gloucestershire: 12th-century corbels
Plate 8.6 Reading Abbey corbel reset in the Forbury Arch, Reading
Plate 8.7 Tewkesbury Abbey nave, with columnar piers
Plate 8.8 Re-set doorway at the southern entrance to St James Church, Reading

List of Tables

Chapter 7

- Table 7.1 Medieval pottery fabrics
Table 7.2 Medieval pottery: occurrence by number and weight of sherds, and by EVE per phase
Table 7.3 Medieval pottery: occurrence per phase by fabric type, main fabrics only, expressed as a percentage of the phase total by weight (g)
Table 7.4 Medieval pottery: mean sherd weight (g) by fabric type, main fabrics only
Table 7.5 Medieval pottery: rim fragmentation clustering
Table 7.6 Medieval pottery: occurrence by fabric type, main fabrics only, expressed as a percentage of the phase total by weight (g), site 12
Table 7.7 Medieval pottery: occurrence by fabric type, main fabrics only, expressed as a percentage of the phase total by weight (g), site 29
Table 7.8 Medieval pottery: vessel occurrence per phase, expressed as a percentage per type of the phase assemblage (in EVE), all fabrics

Table 7.9	Post-medieval pottery sources
Table 7.10	Post-medieval pottery: representation of English wares
Table 7.11	Post-medieval pottery: quantities by site
Table 7.12	Post-medieval pottery from site 12
Table 7.13	Post-medieval pottery from site 29
Table 7.14	Post-medieval pottery from site 28
Table 7.15	Post-medieval pottery from site 101
Table 7.16	Post-medieval pottery from site 150
Table 7.17	Post-medieval pottery from site 300
Table 7.18	Post-medieval pottery: quantities of ware types by project phase (weight and sherd count)
Table 7.19	Post-medieval pottery: range of vessel types (weight and sherd count)
Table 7.20	Post-medieval pottery: pottery-producing features at site 12
Table 7.21	Post-medieval pottery: pottery-producing features at site 29

Chapter 8

Table 8.1	Brick: Thin-format red bricks of pre-19th-century date, numbers of context occurrences per phase
Table 8.2	Brick: Thicker-format red bricks of pre-19th-century date, numbers of context occurrences per phase
Table 8.3	Brick: Large-format bricks of 19th-century date, numbers of context occurrences per phase
Table 8.4	Structural timber: Types of timber structure by phase
Table 8.5	Structural timber: Pile/stake tip cross-sections (958)
Table 8.6	Structural timber: Pile/post/stake conversions (1040)
Table 8.7	Structural timber: Board/plank conversions (331)
Table 8.8	Structural timber: Plate conversions (202)
Table 8.9	Structural timber: Wood species (1740)
Table 8.10	Structural timber: Wood chippings and offcuts species (107)
Table 8.11	Structural timber: Non-structural roundwood wood species (37)
Table 8.12	Window glass: Summary of the plain window glass from site 12
Table 8.13	Window glass: Summary of the plain window glass from site 29
Table 8.14	Ceramic building material: Tiles from site 29 with evidence for burning along one edge only
Table 8.15	Ceramic building materials: Roof tile widths, from site 29, Project Phase 4
Table 8.16	Ceramic building material: Tile widths, from site 29, Project Phase 6
Table 8.17	Ceramic building materials: Tile widths from site 29, Project Phase 7
Table 8.18	Ceramic building materials: Tile widths from site 29, Project Phase 8
Table 8.19	Ceramic building materials: Tile widths from site 29, phase 10a
Table 8.20	Ceramic building materials: Romano-British tile from site 29
Table 8.21	Ceramic building materials: Floor tile from site 29
Table 8.22	Ceramic building materials: Tile from site 300

Chapter 9

Table 9.1	Copper alloy: Total number of objects recovered from each site
Table 9.2	Copper alloy: Total number of objects from each functional category by site
Table 9.3	Copper alloy: Summary quantification of objects from site 29, by phase and functional category
Table 9.4	Copper alloy: Summary quantification of objects from site 12, by phase and functional category
Table 9.5	Copper alloy: Summary quantification of objects from site 101, by phase and functional category
Table 9.6	Copper alloy: Summary quantification of objects from site 28/150, by phase and functional category
Table 9.7	Copper alloy: Summary quantification of objects from site 300 by phase and functional category
Table 9.8	Ironwork: Summary quantification by site and function
Table 9.9	Ironwork: Summary quantification by phase and function
Table 9.10	Ironwork: Yield Hall (site 12) – Summary quantification by phase and function
Table 9.11	Ironwork: The Oracle (Site 29) – Summary quantification by phase and function

Table 9.12	Ironwork: St Giles Mill (Site 300) – Summary quantification phase and function
Table 9.13	Lead objects: Summary quantification by site and function
Table 9.14	Clay tobacco pipes: Recorded pipe marks from Reading
Table 9.15	Textiles and animal fibres: Technical details of textiles from site 12, Project Phase 4
Table 9.16	Textiles and animal fibres: Fleece types in textiles from the Oracle
Table 9.17	Leather: Straps summarised by context and site sub-phase
Table 9.18	Leather: Sheet leather summarised by context and site sub-phase

Chapter 10

Table 10.1	Animal remains: Taphonomy, sites 12 and 29
Table 10.2	Animal remains: Composition of the assemblages from sites 12 and 29.
Table 10.3	Animal remains: Relative frequencies of the main domesticates from sites 12 and 29, according to a) NISP and b) MNI,
Table 10.4	Animal remains: NISP and relative percentages of the main domesticates by phase, trench and feature type, from sites 12 and 29
Table 10.5	Animal remains: Dental ageing data, by phase
Table 10.6	Animal remains: Inter-phase variation in cattle age, as suggested by the horn-cores
Table 10.7	Animal remains: Epiphyseal fusion data, by phase
Table 10.8	Animal remains: Representation of foetal/neonatal pig bones
Table 10.9	Animal remains: Age estimations for horse teeth
Table 10.10	Animal remains: Sexing information
Table 10.11	Animal remains: Skeletal representation data, by phase, for cattle from a) Site 12 and b) Site 29
Table 10.12	Animal remains: Skeletal representation data (NISP and MNI) for a) cattle and b) caprines from selected features on site 29
Table 10.13	Animal remains: Skeletal representation data, by phase, for caprines from a) Site 12 and b) Site 29
Table 10.14	Animal remains: Skeletal representation data, by phase, for pigs from a) Site 12 and b) Site 29
Table 10.15	Animal remains: Anatomical representation data (MNE) for fallow deer, sites 22 and 29 combined
Table 10.16	Animal remains: Skeletal representation data (MNE) for domestic fowl, sites 12 and 29
Table 10.17	Animal remains: Skeletal representation data (MNE) for the two main fish families
Table 10.18	Animal remains: Numbers of horn-cores of each different 'type' by phase
Table 10.19	Animal remains: Incidence of the main caprine pathologies
Table 10.20	Marine shell: Summary quantification of species by phase

Chapter 11

Table 11.1	Waterlogged plant remains from site 12
Table 11.2	Waterlogged plant remains from sites 101, 28 and 29
Table 11.3	Waterlogged plant remains from Channel 13297, St Giles Mill
Table 11.4	Charred plant remains from site 12, the Yield Hall
Table 11.5	Charred plant remains from site 29, the Oracle
Table 11.6	Charred plant remains from Test Pit 27 at the Minster Mill

Summary tables of dendrochronological results by site can be found within the dendrochronology report.

Summary

Between April 1996 and August 1998, Oxford Archaeology carried out extensive archaeological investigations in advance of the development of the Oracle shopping and leisure complex in central Reading. The area investigated covered some 8 hectares on the floodplain of the river Kennet, immediately south of the town centre, with five key excavations targeted on the earliest known historic buildings, water channels and mills.

A long sequence of development at the edge of the floodplain was identified at site 29, starting with timber buildings that may have formed part of the minster of St Mary's during the late 11th and early 12th centuries. During the 12th century an elaborate stone building containing many large hearths and ovens was built on the site, and greatly extended during the later 13th century. It is suggested that this may have been a cookshop belonging to Reading Abbey. During the 16th century the site was in use as a tannery, and the excavations located numerous rows of tanning pits and vats and associated structures. The Oracle workhouse was constructed on the site in the early 17th century, and results from the OA excavations add to existing knowledge of the 200-year development and use of this building from documentary and cartographic sources.

Site 150 investigated the historically attested Minster Mill. Remains from grain and malt processing of probable 12th-century date were excavated, and evidence was recorded for management of the Minster Mill Stream. The most extensive remains found were associated with the rebuilding of the mill in timber and brick during the 17th and 18th centuries. The development of the floodplain for craftworking and industry was studied at site 12, where active management of the river channels

accompanied the construction and use of a sequence of waterfronts, structures for industrial processes and tanning pits. Following extensive land reclamation during the 16th century, the building later known as the Yield Hall was constructed on the site. The excavations traced the development of this house in detail over a period of mixed domestic and craft use during the 17th and 18th centuries, until its incorporation in Wilders Iron Foundry during the 19th. Excavations at site 101 revealed the progressive southwards migration, management and varied uses of the historically attested channel known as the Back Brook.

South of the Kennet site 300 investigated the historically attested St Giles, or Town, mill. Important remains of the medieval mill were recovered, including a complete pitwheel of 12th-century type, along with other early elements of the mill's machinery. Extensive remains survived of a timber mill frame installed in the early 14th century and the timber revetments installed and repaired throughout the medieval period in the channels carrying water to and from the mill itself. Substantial remains were also recovered from major extensions of the mill during the 18th century and its conversion to steam power during the 19th.

A programme of dendrochronological dating was undertaken on numerous timbers recovered from the waterlogged conditions of the site, allowing unusually precise dating of certain structural elements. Amongst large collections of finds, those of particular interest include the medieval pottery, shoes, leatherworking and cobbling waste, glass vessels and a small number of fragments of textile. In addition, the recovery of the largest group of clay pipes yet found in Reading has allowed the development of a bowl-form typology for the town.

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Picture credits

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