

Winchester – a City in the Making

**Archaeological excavations between 2002–2007
on the sites of Northgate House, Staple Gardens
and the former Winchester Library, Jewry St**

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Front cover

Artist's impression showing the area of the excavated site and the north-west corner of the late Saxon *burh* during the mid-10th to mid-11th century, by Mark Gridley

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Summary

This volume presents the results of two adjacent, large-scale, archaeological projects that took place sequentially between 2002 and 2007 within the north-west corner of the historic core of the city of Winchester. The two sites, Northgate House on Staple Gardens and Winchester Library on Jewry Street, were located on ESE facing slopes overlooking the Itchen Valley, and it is precisely this topographic position that shaped the earliest settlement of the area and provided the legacy that influenced all subsequent 2600 years of change and development. The majority of the evidence focuses on the 9th to 14th centuries, although significant remains from the Iron Age and Roman periods were also recovered.

The earliest evidence related to successive groups of roundhouses positioned along a slight terrace that followed the contour of the hillside dating to the early and the middle Iron Age. The latter phase was contemporary with a holloway located 50 m down slope, which linked the northern and southern entrances of a large enclosure called Oram's Arbour. The apparent linear nature of this part of the Iron Age settlement, combined with the lack of evidence for contemporary pits and other settlement features, suggests a sustained and organised layout with potential zoning of activities.

After a possible hiatus in activity, part of the Oram's Arbour enclosure was developed into a major Roman town, *Venta Belgarum*. The principal north-south street of the town was located at the eastern edge of the excavation area, and took its alignment from the pre-existing holloway. The street was associated with a substantial stone lined water channel/culvert that appears to represent the urban continuation of the aqueduct located outside the North Gate. Occupation during the early part of the Roman period does not appear to have been intensive, but included the remarkably well-preserved remains of a timber-framed house that had burnt to the ground. In the later Roman period there are indications of greater activity, with timber structures aligned along the principal street. Further upslope a focus of iron working activity developed

along a secondary east-west street, and another property at some distance from these yielded a full set of bone weaving tablets from its floor. A significant amount of late Roman finds were recovered from Dark Earth deposits that began to form in the late 4th century, after which there is no evidence of significant occupation until the imposition of tenements in the 9th century.

A lack of modern development along the western frontage on Staple Gardens (Brudene Street) resulted in the very exceptional preservation of nearly 350 years of structural development and property usage for five neighbouring tenements. There is also partial evidence for six other tenements opposite these and a further three from the contemporary parallel street (Snitheling Street) to the west. Therefore, aspects of fourteen different properties were excavated and analysed, and links can be suggested between the archaeological data and contemporary documentary sources.

A unique set of scientific dates was obtained and used to create statistical models, which suggest the urban tenement form commenced along Staple Gardens prior to Alfred's *burh* works in the late 9th century. Nearly 1500 post-Roman small finds were recovered, and for the first time from Winchester, a collection of such significant size is considered with reference to its full archaeological context, documenting details of domestic and artisanal activity and trends. These results combine with a wealth of environmental data that provides information on the occupants' diets, the wider environment and rural practices in agriculture and animal husbandry.

As this part of the city became less intensively used in the 13th century, the Archdeacon of Winchester developed a large residence by amalgamating a number of earlier properties, including a small chapel, to create a 'complex' similar in form to a rural manorial model. A handful of finds from the 14th and 15th centuries confirm documentary sources that state the area was depopulated and given over to 'market gardens' as the town contracted.

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THE PROJECT TEAMS

Ben M Ford was Senior Project Manager for Oxford Archaeology during all stages of archaeological fieldwork and post-excavation for both projects (with the exception of the evaluation (Gifford) and the initial excavation (Wessex) at Northgate House). Steve Teague undertook most of the post-excavation analysis, with support from Lisa Brown, Edward Biddulph and Alan Hardy. Anne Dodd reviewed and extensively revised the draft text for Chapters 3, 4 and 5. Anne Dodd and Alex Smith edited the publication text.

Phil Emery and Dr Gerry Wait of Giffords acted as Archaeological Consultants for Northgate House, and Phil Emery continued in this role for the production of this volume.

NORTHGATE HOUSE

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Oxford Archaeology Team

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WINCHESTER DISCOVERY CENTRE

Buildings Team

(WW II Shelters and Library structure)

Jon Gill, Andy Miller, Jane Phimester, for their work on the WWII shelters and Simon Underdown for his work on the Library Building.

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OTHER OA STAFF

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*The Northgate House
Excavation Team
(February 2005)*



*The Discovery Centre
Excavation Team
(March 2006)*