

EXCAVATION OF THE LATE SAXON AND MEDIEVAL CHURCHYARD OF ST MARTIN'S, WALLINGFORD, OXFORDSHIRE

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With contributions by

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Cover illustration: Tenth- to eleventh-century lead and mother-of-pearl crucifix, shell pendant and a Brill/Boarstall Ware jug from Evaluation Trench 1 (105)

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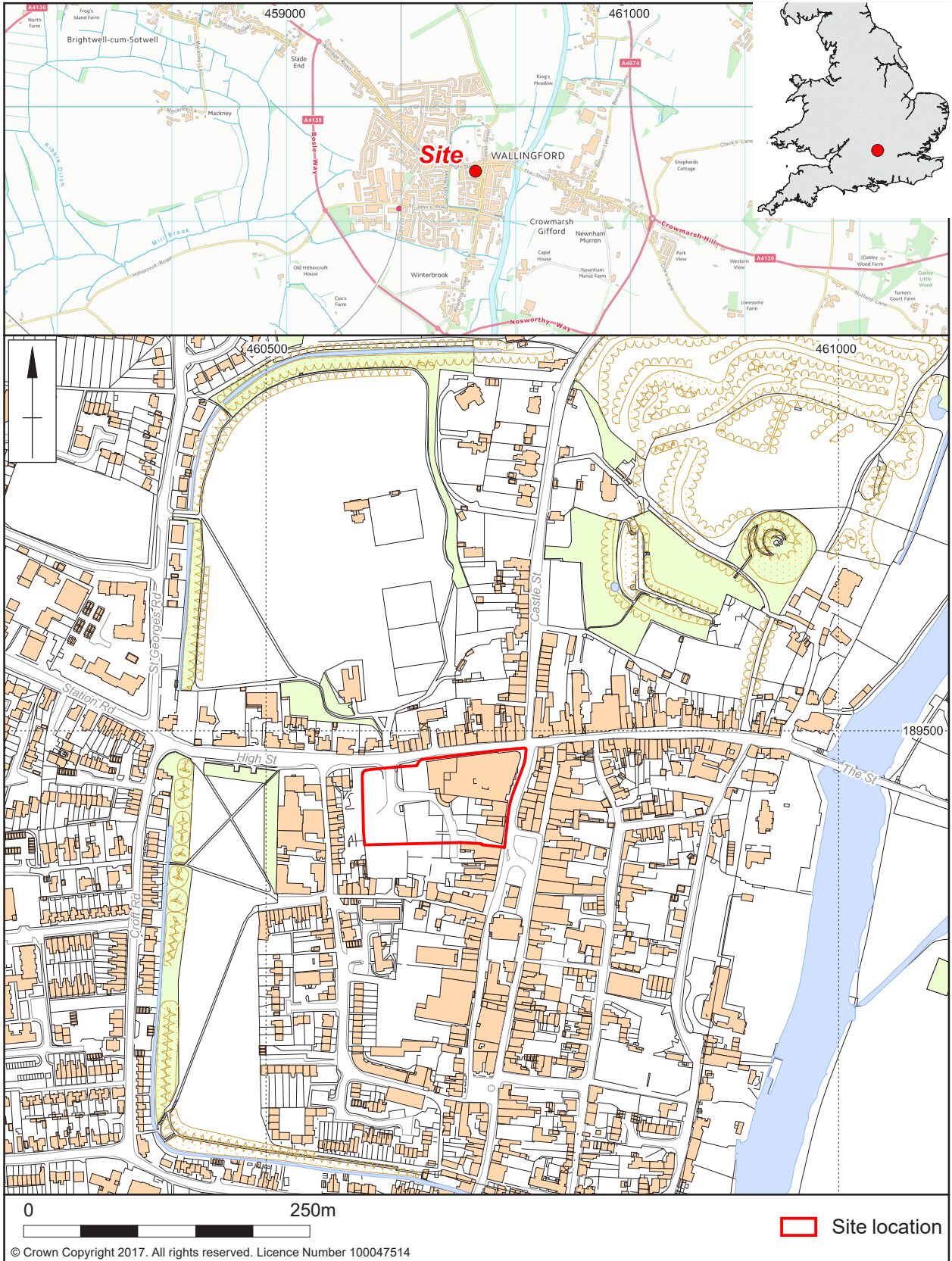


FIGURE 1.1 WALLINGFORD AND THE DEVELOPMENT AREA

1: Introduction

Project background

In support of redevelopment proposals in 2002, Waitrose Ltd began research on the site of a proposed foodstore at the junction of St Martin's Street and High Street, Wallingford, Oxfordshire (NGR: SU 8940 6075; Fig 1.1). This initial work, issued by the former John Samuels Archaeological Consultants as a Cultural Heritage Assessment (JSAC 696/02/02) in May 2002, highlighted the site as the probable location of the former parish church of St Martin adjacent to the cross-roads at the historic centre of Wallingford. Additionally, previous ground interventions on and around the site had repeatedly disturbed human remains.

Subsequent observation of geotechnical test pits and the discovery of further human remains led to the excavation of a series of evaluation trenches in 2003, which were the subject of an unpublished interim planning report. The range of evaluation trenches was expanded in 2004, both inside and outside existing buildings. Upon discovery of a sequence of burials in a relatively concentrated area, the trenching phase was rolled into a widespread excavation of the extent of the former St Martin's churchyard in order to mitigate the effect of the mechanical removal of some existing

foundations from the 1960s and the substantial planned foundations of the current Waitrose foodstore.

Half of the work was carried out indoors, within and around the 1960s buildings on the site, which were largely untenanted. The remainder was left until these buildings had been reduced to the level of their concrete ground beams.

During the course of the excavation the remains of six broad but continuous phases of inhumations were recorded. The earliest, of late Saxon origin, cut into the natural Thames gravels. Subsequent earth-cut graves had continued to build up the cemetery soils until three metres of grave-earth overlay the gravel. Human remains, comprising both articulated burials and disarticulated charnel, lay throughout this thickness, but few articulated examples displayed visible grave-cuts in the homogeneous soils. The uppermost inhumations had been disturbed by the foundations of the 1960s shops on the site. In total 211 individual burials were recorded, of which 187 were partial or complete articulated skeletons, the rest being deliberate reburials of charnel material or portions of skeletons, which although articulated, represented too little of the body for analysis. Further elements of disturbed charnel were evident throughout



FIGURE 1.2 REBURIAL OF HUMAN REMAINS DECEMBER 2013



FIGURE 1.3 DECEMBER 2013 RE-COMMITTAL SERVICE UNDERTAKEN BY FATHER DAVID O'SULLIVAN

the grave-soil, skulls being particularly noticeable. Structural remains were present, including a late Saxon mortar mixer and a wall, although none of these could be stated with any certainty to be a part of the former St Martin's church structure. Finds were few but some were significant in the funerary context.

A client report was produced for the archaeological work in 2010 (Soden 2010b). The excavation archive and finds have been deposited with Wallingford Museum Service, with the exception of the vast majority of the human remains. Reburial of the human remains took place in December 2013 in accordance with the terms of the relevant exhumation license issued under Section 25 of the 1857 Burial Act. The service was undertaken by Father David O'Sullivan and comprised a full Latin rite of re-committal (Figs 1.2 and 1.3). The human remains were buried in the municipal cemetery of Wallingford in Castle Street. The congregation included the Mayor and the High Steward of the town as well as the author of

this publication. A tooth and a rib were retained with the excavation archive in Wallingford Museum, for future scientific research.

In the 2013 report on the archaeology of Wallingford, an overview of the St Martin's excavation results was included (Christie *et al* 2013, 284-288).

Topography and geology

The site is recorded as lying on River Terrace Gravels (SSEW 1983). The local soils are of the Sutton 2 Association (571v), well drained and of a coarse, loamy consistency.

At the time of excavation the site was either outside, covered in concrete and tarmac hardstandings, or lay under concrete floors within existing shops. In total it covered approximately 0.9 hectares and the modern ground surface at the time of excavation was broadly level at c49m above Ordnance Datum.