

Wallingford

Early history: 5th-6th C cemetery to SW suggests small settlement. Important fording point (evidence of Bronze age votive offerings.) Royal burh established on largely greenfield site by Alfred at end of 9th century: one of the fortified centres listed in The Burghal Hidage, defensive system against Viking expansion and to secure dominance of Wessex. Wallingford assigned 2,400 hides, same as Winchester, Oxford with 1,400. Suggests Wallingford seen as important bridgehead burh on Thames, military HQ. Defensive zone of 43 hectares, with expectation of 4 men to defend every 16.5 feet. Massive earthen ramparts with timber palisade, water filled outer ditch, intra-mural ditch, streets demarcating quadrants, gateways. Four wards based on the four quadrants, each with church. Royal 'palace' in NE quadrant. NW quadrant (later called Bullcroft) and SW (Kinecroft) left undeveloped possibly for military encampment as well as animal pastures. Possible timber bridge across river. Becomes shire centre with mint.

Norman Conquest: Where Stigand archbishop of Canterbury submitted to William and king crossed Thames. Castle begun c 1070 in palace quadrant. Priory in NW quadrant. Domesday entry shows importance as shire centre. Evidence of houses newly built in SW quadrant. Population perhaps 2,000 in c 500 houses. Weekly market. Value increased from £30 in 1066 to £60 in 1086. Domesday refers to 22 Frenchman's dwellings: possibly in SW quadrant or outside south gate. Evidence of some parts of bridge in stone in 12th C. But Wigod, important Saxon, continued to hold extensive lands: his daughter married a Norman: probably the origins of the honour of Wallingford, later an important feudal holding. Important in Anarchy when Stephen built temporary castles across river at Crowmarsh. Granted charter by Henry II in 1155 for its loyalty, confirmed in 1267 by Henry III. Substantial towns records in Berkshire Record office, including court rolls from 1225. Mayors known from 1219.

Later medieval: castle much expanded in mid-late 13th C when granted to Richard, earl of Cornwall (younger brother of Henry III), who also spends much money on stone bridge. Chapel of St Nicholas in castle refounded as collegiate. Honour of Wallingford becomes part of the earldom (later duchy) of Cornwall though often in hands of queen or queen mother. Town declines in 14th C. Population falls to 1,250. (Lack of friaries; no murage for developing walls). County administration transferred to Abingdon in mid-16th C. Wallingford castle a royalist stronghold in English Civil War (town population then c. 600). Twelve-week siege 1646, castle demolished 1652. Site in royal hands till 1817.

Priory of Holy Trinity: Probably a pre-conquest secular college reformed by introduction of Benedictine monks. Possibly founded by Nigel d'Albini in reign of William II. By 1093 was became a cell of St Albans abbey. As it was based on an existing parish church on High Street, its claustral building lay to north. Link with Reading: in 1154 its holding of Bucklebury church was granted by St Albans abbey and its priory at Wallingford to Reading Abbey in return for Reading Abbey surrendering its church of Aston's claim to parish of Shephall, Herts, which went to St Albans.

Wallingford priory had six monks in 1385, four in 1481, three in 1522. In 1524 Cardinal Wolsey acquired papal bull to suppress priory (and 20 other religious foundations elsewhere) for funds to build his college in Oxford. Priory surrendered to king 1525. Wolsey commissioned Thomas Cromwell to survey it, sending its deeds to the dean of Cardinal College (which explains why they are now in Bodleian Library). King granted it to Wolsey in 1528. Demolition began in 1529 when stone used to repair the college of St Nicholas at castle. In 1530 Ralph Tyler paid £3 13s 4d for 'taking down the priory church'. Town spent £9 on buying half the stone for the bridge (120 cart loads). (Evidence of stonework used in other town buildings north of High Street.)

Site leased to John Purdon in 1538 (he had been the prior's housekeeper in 1522). In 1547 site 'wherein the last prior of Wallingford did inhabit' was granted to John Norreys of Bray. Likely that prior's/guests lodgings near gate rebuilt as fashionable courtyard house by 1564. But fell out of use in 18th C.

Churches: In 12th C, had 11 parochial churches and three chapels including bridge chapel over eastern entry gate. By 1439 only four remained, All Hallows (destroyed in siege of 1646), St Mary le More in Market Place; St Leonard (possibly pre-burh); St Peter's near bridge. All three remaining churches much rebuilt. St Ruald (or Rumbold) was granted by Henry I to Reading abbey: 14th century its parish amalgamated with that of St Leonard and church demolished.

N.M. Herbert, 'The borough of Wallingford 1155-1400, unpublished Ph D thesis, University of Reading 1971. Free download from ETHOS site

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