

WINCHESTER STUDIES
General editor: Martin Biddle



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ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURE
OF EARLY WINCHESTER



The River Itchen and the vegetation of its water-meadows, looking south, June 2021

WINCHESTER STUDIES 10



ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURE
OF EARLY WINCHESTER

Edited by

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With contributions by

Debby Banham, Martin Biddle, Beatrice Clayre, Francis J. Green, Erwin Isenberg,
Derek Keene, Suzanne Keene, Michael Monk, Peter Murphy, Peter J. Osborne,
Patrick Ottaway, Jane M. Renfrew, Jan Z. Titow, and Dorian Williams

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In memory of Leo Biek (1921–2002), founding father
and first champion of environmental archaeology in this country

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

As has been the case with other (but not all) volumes of Winchester Studies, the origin of this volume goes back to the very first season of excavations on the Cathedral Car Park site in 1961. It was immediately obvious then that the waterlogged and other anaerobic deposits preserved large quantities of organic materials which offered the possibility of adding a new dimension to the study of the city's history, that of its environment through the last two thousand years.

The recognition of this possibility lay not only in the richness of the materials evidently available. It lay more particularly in the vision which those of us who in the previous three years had studied in Professor Grahame Clark's Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge had gained from the teaching of Eric Sidney Higgs (1908–76), the founder of the 'Cambridge Palaeoeconomy School'. A farmer himself, Eric had the wealth of experience to grasp the possibilities offered by organic remains, whether of animal bones or plants, and made sure that we too realized what might be achieved.

In the months after coming down from Cambridge in June 1961, it was inevitable that Eric's teaching would inform the recovery of plant, animal, and human remains from the Cathedral Car Park site. It was inevitable too that this should have remained a characteristic of the excavations in Winchester over the next decade, of which over half a century later this book is the result. And what a delight that Jane Renfrew, herself a Cambridge-trained archaeologist and palaeoethnobotanist, should have agreed to be its editor.

12 April 2021

Martin Biddle

FOREWORD

Jane M. Renfrew

THANKS to the generosity of donors, publication of this volume is now finally achieved. It was originally conceived in the late 1970s after three of my M.Phil. students in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Southampton successfully completed their degrees. They were examining soil samples collected in Martin Biddle's Winchester excavations of 1961–71, looking for seeds in order to reconstruct the environment and uses of plants in the city from Roman to later medieval times. Peter Murphy worked on the Roman samples, Michael Monk on those from Anglo-Saxon deposits, and Francis Green on those from later medieval deposits: the impressive results of their detailed analyses form Chapters 9, 10, and 11 of this book. Pollen analyses undertaken by Erwin Isenberg, published here in Chapter 7, shed light on the environment within the city, and these four studies formed the original core of the projected book. Subsequent studies on the uses of wood by Suzanne Keene, then a member of the Winchester Research Unit, the identification of mosses by Dorian Williams, and the remains of beetles by Peter Osborne, have filled out the picture. The detailed study of the modern natural environment of Winchester by Patrick Ottaway (PJO Archaeology) forms a valuable background context to these studies.

Comparison of these results with medieval written records gives us a more complete understanding of these aspects of life in early Winchester. The earliest written record of Winchester plants is that of ones which may have been known to Ælfric of Eynsham (d. c. 1010) when he was a pupil of Æthelwold (bishop of Winchester, 963–84). These are listed in his eleventh-century *Nomina Herbarum*, discussed here by Debby Banham in Chapter 3.

Most of the historic records for the uses of plants in the city and its environs belong to the medieval period and have been reviewed here by Derek Keene, Assistant Director of the Winchester Research Unit and author of the *Survey of Medieval Winchester* (Winchester Studies 2), who had himself been one of the supervisors of the excavations on Lower Brook Street.

The hints of medieval gardens within the city walls, especially those at the castle and at Wolvesey Palace, are discussed by Beatrice Clayre and Martin Biddle. It is not clear if the inhabitants of Lower Brook Street grew vegetables and herbs in their back yards, although some of the properties away from the High Street did have quite long yards or gardens. There is some evidence that the gardens of Wolvesey Palace saw the growing of vegetables including peas, beans, onions, leeks, and garlic, and the fruit trees cultivated there included apples, pears, and vines.

Most of the agricultural produce was brought into the city from outside for the town's markets and the mills. The main staples were wheat, barley, and oats; there are very few references to rye or to vegetables such as peas, beans, and vetches. Mixed crops of wheat and winter-sown barley ('mancorn') feature in some of the records of crops brought in from the extensive Hampshire

estates of the bishopric and the cathedral priory, and these are discussed in detail by Jan Z. Titow. Crops of wheat and barley were also grown in the east and west fields of Wolvesey Palace, close to the city. The produce of these harvests was brought to the numerous mills inside or close to the city, or was sold in the market near the cathedral. Exotic imported spices and fruits were sold at the city's St Giles' Fair.

It is in Section III on the archaeological evidence, that we get the fullest picture of the natural environment and of the cultivated crops available in the city. The discussions of finds of seeds from the various sites of the Roman, Anglo-Saxon, and late medieval periods in Winchester show the wide range of wild species, reflecting the natural environment, and the more limited number of cultivated and gathered plants which made up the diet of the inhabitants and of their livestock. This evidence is based on discarded rubbish in pits of various kinds, rather than stores of foodstuffs, and also includes remains of animal fodder and bedding. Wild fruits were also being gathered from the countryside including crab apples, sloes, plums, cherries, blackberries, elderberries, and hazelnuts.

Through the combination of all these sources of evidence, reported here in detail, we can begin to understand more fully the roles of agriculture and the environment in the development of Anglo-Saxon and later medieval Winchester.

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