

# Archaeological assessment of Oswestry, Shropshire

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## Summary

*The historic town of Oswestry was surveyed during the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey, a desk-based study of 64 smaller historic towns in Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Archaeological and documentary evidence relating to the historic core of Oswestry was carefully analysed, comprising topographic data, published and unpublished archaeological reports, museum collections, primary and secondary historical sources, historical maps, and field data recorded by the project team.*

*Detailed evidence is provided on the character and layout of the settlement in the medieval and post-medieval periods. For each period the available information is analysed and mapped in detail, and a model of the development of the town is proposed. In addition, the evidence for pre-urban occupation is considered, together with evidence of 19th century occupation. All archaeologically-relevant information has been recorded as part of the county Sites and Monuments Record. Specialist assessments of artefacts, ecofacts, standing buildings and documentary sources are included. A detailed archaeological research framework has been developed for Oswestry, which will inform future archaeological investigations as well as management decisions.*

*The historic core of Oswestry contains buried archaeological deposits, and these are judged to have high potential. In addition there is moderate potential for the recovery of artefact and ecofact assemblages. The historic buildings constitute a complementary body of evidence, and are judged to have high potential for detailed study and recording. The surviving documentary sources are reasonably extensive and consequently there is moderate potential for further study.*

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Location and landuse

The urban area of Oswestry is located at NGR SJ 290296 in Oswestry District. The modern settlement lies at a road junction (the A483 and A4083) and comprises the historic settlement focus with 20th century housing to the north, south west and east.

### 1.2 Topography, geology and soils

Oswestry lies at a height of between 120m and 140m OD. The underlying topography is sloping ground with minor watercourses draining southeast to the River Morda. The soils are seasonally waterlogged stagnogley soils of the Cegin Association over most of the town on the west and seasonally waterlogged stagnogley soils developed in till and related glaciofluvial deposits of the Clifton Association on the east (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Ragg *et al* 1984) overlying boulder clay and Erbistock Beds (British Geological

Survey 1:50,000, sheet 137).

### 1.3 Chronological outline

**Early occupation.** There is no evidence for early occupation on the site of Oswestry. However three standing stones are recorded in the area, and stone axes and other prehistoric artefacts have been recorded (Stanford 1991, 23). The major Iron Age hillfort of Old Oswestry lies a short distance north of the town (Stanford 1991, 50; SA 351). The battle of *Maserfelth* was reputedly fought in 642 near Oswestry, although the evidence for this is equivocal (see below, Section 1.4). The course of Wat's Dyke, dated to the 8th century, runs north to south immediately to the east of the town (Stanford 1991, 118-20).

**Anglo-Saxon settlement.** It is probable that the Anglo-Saxon settlement focus in the area was at Maesbury (Gelling 1992, 74). The manor of Maesbury is recorded in Domesday Book, when it was held by Reginald the Sheriff from Roger, Earl of Shropshire.

**The Norman castle.** Domesday Book mentions a priest, a church and a castle (Thorn and Thorn 1986, 253c). The castle was built by Reginald before 1086 and was known as *Luvre* (ie "The Work", Beresford 1988, 482; see section 1.4). The origin of St Oswald's church is not known although it was clearly established by 1086, and was probably a collegiate church serving the large estate. There is no direct evidence for the date of foundation or early status of the church, although cloisters were documented in the 16th century (Cranage 1908, 808-17; Watson 1988, 1-2; Chandler 1993, 394). It is possible that an earlier minster church at Maesbury was transferred to this site after the Conquest (Eyton 1860, 335).

The estate of Maesbury (Oswestry) was held by the FitzAlan family throughout the medieval period, and developed their landholding into the marcher lordship of Oswestry by the late 12th century - "the liberty of Oswestry in the March of Wales out of the county" - which they held together with the marcher lordship of Clun (Davies 1978, 20-3; Pounds 1990, 81). The castle was a depot for major campaigns against the Welsh (Smith 1978, 222), as well as forming the base for a defensive force of light cavalry (Suppe 1994, 82-5). Although Oswestry Castle was not the principle residence of the FitzAlans, it was used as such occasionally and a parliament was held there in 1398 (Pryce-Jones 1982, 25).

**The foundation of the borough.** The castle formed the focus for the development of a new town by *c* 1100 (Beresford 1988, 482; Gelling 1992, 202). The town may have originally developed within a large bailey to the south of the town (Rowley 1972, 177; Beresford 1988, 180), in a similar fashion to Bridgnorth, although alternative sequences of development have been put forward (Pratt 1980, 12-3). The earliest recorded charter was granted between 1190 and 1200 to the burgesses of "Blancminster" (Beresford and Finberg 1973, 152; Eyton 1860, 324). A fair was granted in 1228, and a second charter was granted in 1263 (Smith 1978, 223). The market was worth £20 a year by 1271 (Beresford 1988, 482), and trade with Wales was developing by the late 13th century (Smith 1978, 223). There were 46 burgages in 1276 and 127 by 1301, increasing to 163 by 1393, together with many other holdings (Pratt 1980, 12; Slack 1951, 142-52). In the later medieval period there were three fairs (Watkin 1920, 101).

The town and castle had an obvious strategic importance and was burnt by King John in 1215 and by Llywelyn ap Iorwerth in 1233 (Watkin 1920, 3). The town had certainly grown beyond the original limits of the castle bailey before the late 13th century when the town walls were constructed. Documentary evidence indicates that construction of the town walls may have begun in 1257, but the main period of construction of the wall and its four gates was probably after 1277 (Pratt 1980, 4-5). In 1282 the town was attacked by the Welsh on two occasions, and further construction and repair was carried out between 1283 and 1304 (*ibid*, 4-5). The castle was strengthened in the late 13th century (Pounds 1990, 145).

Documentary evidence indicates that Welshmen were allowed to be burgesses of Oswestry by the 14th century, although they were probably few in number (Smith 1978, 233). Further charters were granted in 1399 and 1407, but these seem to have been intended to maintain the power of the FitzAlans (the earls of Arundel) in the town (Smith 1978, 240).

The town had expanded beyond its gates by the end of the 14th century, and there was both an increase in the number of burgages and subdivision of existing plots (Smith 1978, 225). The legendary site of the battle of *Maserfelth* southwest of the town was commemorated in the medieval period by a chapel and a well (Watkin 1920). There was another chapel, dedicated to St Edith, northeast of the town (Chandler 1993, 394-5) and the hospital of St John lay to the southeast of the town (Watkin 1920, 28-8). Oswestry grammar school was founded early in the 15th century, reputedly in 1407 (Leighton 1884, 258).

Oswestry was an important urban centre in the Marches of Shropshire and Wales in the late medieval period. The military significance of the castle was reduced from the end of the 13th century, but it was used to muster Welsh troops for war in France in the 14th and 15th centuries (Smith 1978, 222). The town was probably fairly stable in size between the late 14th and late 16th centuries, and it was burnt by Owain Glyndwr in 1400 (Smith 1978, 225). Through the late medieval period the Welsh population of the town grew until it was numerically dominant, and it was regarded as culturally a Welsh town, praised as the "London of Wales" by poets (Smith 1978, 228, 233). There was an incipient form of borough council in the 15th century (*ibid*, 241).

**Medieval urban economy.** The economic development of the town in the medieval period has not been studied in detail, although there is piecemeal documentary evidence for particular crafts and industries. An extent of 1393 documents a kiln or bakehouse, shops, and tenter frames (Slack 1951, 142-52). There is also documentary evidence for various trades from occupational names such as smith, salter, mercer, glover, walker (ie fuller), dyer, weaver and draper (Slack 1951, 142-152; Smith 1978, 230).

The economy of Oswestry in the late medieval and post-medieval period was based on the sale of Welsh cloth, as recorded by Leland in the early 16th century (Chandler 1993, 395). The industry developed in north Wales in the 14th century, with the growth of fulling mills (Smith 1978, 230). Leland stated that the principle streets were Cross Street, Bailey Street and Newgate Street (Chandler 1993, 395), and that there were four suburbs: Strad y llan (Church Street), Wallia Street (Willow Street), Beatrice Street, which contained 140 barns, and Blackgate Street (Salop Street), with 30 barns (*ibid*, 395-6).

**The late medieval and post-medieval period.** The castle had lost its military importance by the end of the medieval period. Oswestry ceased to be a marcher lordship in 1536, and formally became part of Shropshire (Davies 1978, 30). By the late 16th century there was a form of borough council, called the council of twenty-five and a borough court (Leighton 1880, 81-7; Smith 1978, 241). There were major fires in 1542 and 1544, and in 1567 a total of 200 houses were burnt, after which the area around St Oswald's church was known as Pentrepoeth, or "burnt end of the town" (Watkin 1920, 3, 13). There was an outbreak of plague ("the sweating sickness") in 1559 when 500 people died (*ibid*, 8; Pryce-Jones 1982, 15-6).

The lordship of Oswestry passed to the Howard family in 1580 and was held by the crown between 1590 and 1603, when it was granted to Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk (Pryce-Jones 1982, 20-1). By 1602 the castle was in poor repair and had been partly demolished, and the town walls were in a similar state (Slack 1951, 45, 48; Pratt 1980, 17-19). A corporate charter was granted by James I in 1617 which gave the town full borough status (Watkin 1920, 2; Catherall 1855, 59, 77-82), although by this date the town had already acquired the functions of a corporate borough (Smith 1978, 242). The monopoly of the wool trade was lost in 1621, and the town suffered an economic decline (Pryce-Jones 1982, 22-3).

The town had a Royalist garrison during the Civil War. The town was attacked in 1634 and many of the buildings in the suburbs were demolished. St Oswald's church was partly demolished and used as a defensive post, and the castle was quickly surrendered (Watkin 1920, 66-7, 289-90). The castle was demolished by *c* 1650 and the church was subsequently rebuilt in the 1670s (Watkin 1920, 62-76, 291-2). The town walls were demolished by 1660 but the four gates were left standing (Pratt 1980, 20-10). A charter was granted by Charles II in 1673, and the office of Lord Mayor was instituted (Leighton 1884, 49).

**Post-medieval urban economy.** The town held a monopoly in the Welsh wool trade in the 16th and early 17th century (Watkin 1920, 337-41). Cattle also formed an important part of the economy of the town, as Oswestry controlled the trade in cattle between lowland Shropshire and upland Wales, as well as benefitting from the earl of Arundel's interest in stock (Smith 1978, 231-2). A large number of industries are documented in the post-medieval period, including bleacher, bellfounder, pavier, scythe-maker, baker, cardmaker, dyer, currier, felt-maker, glover, hatter, cloth-worker, mercer, weaver, miller, nailer, tiler and shoemakers (Watkin 1920, 333-4). Craft guilds or "companies" were formed in the 16th and 17th century of tanners, shoemakers (corvisors), butchers, mercers, ironmongers, glovers, hatters, weavers, druggists and maltsters (Watkin 1920, 334-7; Leighton 1884). The Welsh woollen trade recovered in Oswestry in the 18th century (Pryce-Jones 1982, 23-4), and the town was also at the centre of an area of papermaking (Lloyd 1938).

**The 18th and 19th century.** There was a major town fire in 1742 (Watkin 1920, 4). A public walk and summer house was laid out in the churchyard in the early 18th century (*ibid*, 76-8), as a local version of the walks that were developed in other towns in the 18th century (Borsay 1989, 162-72). The medieval grammar school was replaced by a new school southwest of the town in 1776 (Watkin 1920, 42-3), and a theatre was built by 1775 (*ibid*, 29-30).

The main roads from Oswestry were developed as turnpike roads in the late 18th century with tollhouses and gates at the edge of the town, and a new road was laid southeast from Black Gate (Watkin 1920, 14-16, 154-5, 238-8). The coaching trade developed in the early 19th century, and the Shrewsbury, Oswestry and Chester Junction Railway was built in 1848 which had led to marked economic development (*ibid* 1920, 6, 332).

#### 1.4 Placename studies

The placename evidence relating to Oswestry is rather complex, and recent research by Gelling (1990, 229-31; 1992, 74-5) has reversed earlier opinion about the significance of the name and its associations. Domesday Book records the estate of *Meresberie*, meaning "manor on the boundary", and the castle of *Luvre* (ie *l'oeuvre*), meaning "the work" or "the fortification" (Beresford 1988, 482; Gelling 1992, 74; Thorn and Thorn 1986, 253c). The settlement of Maesbury lies south of Oswestry and may be the Anglo-Saxon settlement focus (Gelling 1992, 74).

The battle of *Maserfelth* was fought in 642 between Oswald, King of Northumbria, and Penda, ruler of Mercia. The battle ended in the martyrdom of Oswald, and the site of the battle has long been identified as Oswestry (Eyton 1860, 317-8; Watkins 1920). Although *Maserfelth* was identified with Oswestry in the medieval period, Gelling has pointed out that the placename evidence is far from conclusive. There are at least two other claimed sites for the battle of *Maserfelth*, in Gloucestershire and in Lancashire, and the identification of Oswestry as the site may be due to a medieval confusion between *Maserfelth* and *Meresberie* and a mis-translation of *Oswaldestre* as "Oswald's Cross" (Gelling 190, 231; 1992, 74-5).

*Oswaldestre* was first recorded in *c* 1180 as the name of the site of the castle, but derives from a pre-conquest place-name, *Oswaldestreow*, meaning "Oswald's tree" (Gelling 1990,

231). Gelling believes this name originally referred to a boundary marker on the estate of Maesbury. However in the late 12th century the placename was interpreted as meaning "Oswald's Cross", and from the 13th century the Welsh form *Croes Oswald* is recorded (*ibid*). In the 13th century the estate was also called *Blancmuster* or *Album Monasterium*, referring to the church, but after 1300 *Oswaldestre* predominated (*ibid*).

### 1.5 Syntheses of documentary and archaeological data

The documentary evidence relating to Oswestry for the medieval period has been described by Eyton (1860, 316-53) and Catherall (1855). Medieval and post-medieval surveys have been published by Slack (1951) and Leighton studied the post-medieval corporate records (six papers published 1879-84). There are useful modern accounts of the medieval and post-medieval development of the town (Pryce-Jones 1982; Smith 1978). Watkin (1920) provided a detailed account of buildings, industry and social history, and is particularly informative for the 18th and 19th centuries. Further relevant works not consulted for this assessment include Price (1815) and Rees (1975 and 1985).

Archaeological and documentary evidence relating to the town walls has been considered in detail by Pratt (1980). The archaeological evidence for the town has previously been assessed by Watson (1988). The present assessment was carried out by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in 1994. The text was revised in March 1995 to incorporate the results of fieldwork undertaken by the Survey (see section 1.7). No information published after December 1994 has been incorporated into this assessment.

### 1.6 Cartographic sources

Nineteenth century maps include a map of 1833 (Wood 1833; SRO 3551/4) and Ordnance Survey first edition 1:2500 maps (*Shropshire sheet XIX.2 and XIX.14* (1875)).

### 1.7 Archaeological excavations and surveys

A total of ten archaeological excavations and field investigations have been carried out in Oswestry. A number of excavations have been carried out to determine the course of the town defences, although not all have been successful in this aim (Pratt 1980).

Two medium-sized excavations have recorded the town wall and ditch, in Chapel Street (Reynolds 1984; SA 5717) and Church Street (unpublished excavation; SA 5718). There have also been eight antiquarian observations and salvage records of the town wall and ditch, and stone rubble from the wall, documented by Pratt (1980, 27-33; SA 5711; SA 5712; SA 5713; SA 5761; SA 5770; SA 5716; SA 5804; SA 5806).

Fieldwork in 1988 on the castle (SA 332) comprised a study of the structural remains, resistivity survey and small-scale excavation (Worthington 1988, 4, 11-15, fig 5: site 6; SA 332). Two further small excavations have been carried out adjacent to the motte (Worthington 1988, 5, fig 5: site 3; SA 5807, and *ibid*, 5-6, 7-11, fig 5: site 5; SA 5808).

The excavation in Chapel Street also recorded medieval structures (Reynolds 1984; SA 5717). A small excavation near Welsh Walls recorded a medieval building and features (Pratt 1980, 39-40; SA 5710). Salvage recording in Willow Street near the line of the town wall recorded a post-medieval cellar (Watson 1984; SA 5719). Two excavations in Cae Glas Park located medieval and post-medieval deposits, including demolition debris from the town wall (Pratt 1980, 37-9; SA 5714), and a Victorian swimming pool (*ibid*, 39; SA 5715).

Some of the above excavations have not been fully documented and the potential of these sites remains largely unknown. An evaluation excavation in Lower Brook Street is fully documented but produced negative results (Hannaford 1991; SA 5722).

Fieldwork was undertaken by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in November 1994. This identified remains, investigated and revised the extent of components, and recorded 18th and 19th century cellarge and modern developments in the urban area.

### 1.8 Acknowledgments and personnel

Survey fieldwork was undertaken by Hal Dalwood and Dale Rouse. Analysis, report writing and editing were carried out by Hal Dalwood.

## 2 Pre-urban evidence

There is disparate evidence for prehistoric and early medieval occupation in the study area. The evidence includes a stone axe (SA 5702), two standing stones (SA 333; SA 336), Bronze Age cremation burial (SA 4287), a barbed-and-tanged arrowhead (SA 5706), and a small assemblage of Roman finds (SA 5700). The reputed site of the battle of *Maserfelth* is recorded (SA 4286), but the evidence for locating this battle at Oswestry must be regarded as doubtful (see above, section 1.4). The earthwork of Wat's Dyke lies to the east of the historic town (SA 1001) and two trenches have been cut through it (unpublished excavations; SA 5707; SA 5708). A contemporary burial has also been recorded (SA 334).

However there is little evidence for early settlement at Oswestry and it is probable that there was no settlement before the Conquest and the development of the castle and new town.

## 3 Medieval archaeological evidence

### 3.1 Medieval remains and buildings

A total of 17 archaeological excavations or observations have identified medieval buried remains in Oswestry, the majority of which relate to the town defences. Watkin located a number of antiquarian observations of the town wall or the ditch (Watkin 1920, 111-2, 167, 279; SA 5712; SA 5713; SA 5761; SA 5770; SA 5804). The town wall was objectively recorded for the first time in 1973 (Day 1974; SA 5716). Modern excavations have recorded the town wall and ditch in Chapel Street (Reynolds 1984; SA 5717) and the ditch alone in Church Street (unpublished excavation; SA 5718). There have been four modern observations and salvage records of the town wall, ditch, or rubble interpreted as debris from the wall (SA 5711; SA 5728; SA 5805; SA 5806). Manchester University has carried out a small excavation on the castle motte (Worthington 1988; SA 332), and in two areas adjacent to the motte which demonstrated the presence of a large ditch around the motte and that the town wall crossed the ditch (Worthington 1988, 5, fig 5: site 3; SA 5807, and *ibid.*, 5-6, 7-11, fig 5: site 5; SA 5808).

The excavation in Chapel Street also recorded medieval structures (Reynolds 1984; SA 5717), and a small excavation in Willow Street recorded a medieval building and features (Pratt 1980, 39-40; SA 5710). Medieval steelyard weights have been recorded from The Cross (SA 5727). Medieval sites outside the historic core include St Oswald's Well and Chapel (SA 335 and SA 5709) and St Edith's Chapel (SA 338).

A total of eight medieval buildings survive in Oswestry, including the remnants of the stone castle (SA 332), the 13th century church of St Oswald (SA 340), the early 15th century school (SA 13092), and five late 15th or early 16th century timber-framed buildings (SA 1120; SA 13075; SA 13082; SA 15101; SA 18712). The buildings include Llywd Mansion, dated to the 17th century but incorporating parts of a medieval building (Ferris 1988; SA 1120).

### 3.2 Medieval urban components

Analysis of the evidence summarised above and of cartographic and documentary sources indicated the existence of 23 urban components. The characteristics of these urban components are summarised below.

**Castle** (SA 5782). Documentary evidence indicates that the castle at Oswestry was built before 1085 by Reginald, the Sheriff of Shropshire. The castle consists of a large motte, probably in origin a glacial mound (Pratt 1980, 3). Documentary evidence indicates there were a number of rooms and buildings, including a chapel dedicated to St Nicholas, but the basic layout of the castle is not known (Parry-Jones 1894).

Remains of the stone keep survive on top of the motte (SA 332). A small excavation in 1988 on top of the motte revealed a layer of masonry rubble 1.0m thick, associated with the 17th century demolition of the castle, but did not locate medieval deposits (Worthington 1988, site 6; SA 332). Survey revealed a number of remnants of medieval masonry, but a resistivity survey was inconclusive (*ibid*). Two small excavations adjacent to the motte demonstrated the presence of a ditch around the motte and recovered medieval pottery (Worthington 1988, site 3 and site 5; SA 5807; SA 5808).

**Churchyard** (SA 5784). The medieval churchyard component contained the church of St Oswald, built in the 13th century (Pevsner 1958, 222-3; SA 340) and the grammar school, built in the early 15th century (SA 13092). The extent of the medieval churchyard is based on the 1833 map (Wood 1833); it is defined by Welsh Walls, Upper Brook Street and property boundaries, and the eastern boundary is known to have lain slightly further east before widening of Church Street (Watkin 1920, 62).

**Town defences** (SA 493). The town defences were built in the late 13th century (Pratt 1980, 4-5). There were four gates, one on each of the four main roads into the town: New Gate on Church Street (SA 494); Beatrice Gate on Beatrice Street (SA 495); Black Gate on Salop Street (SA 496); and Willow Gate on Willow Street (SA 497). The town wall has been excavated west of Chapel Street (Reynolds 1984; SA 5717). The wall was 2.0m wide and constructed of mortared ashlar, and 13th century pottery was recovered from the construction trench. The wall was separated by a berm from the ditch, which was over 3m deep and was estimated to be as wide as Chapel Street (*ibid*). The ditch has also been excavated in English Walls (unpublished excavation: SA 5718) and the town wall has been excavated where it crossed the ditch surrounding the castle motte (Worthington 1988, site 5; SA 5808).

There have been eleven other observations of the town wall or ditch which have indicated the alignment of the defences (SA 5711; SA 5712; SA 5713; SA 5716; SA 5719; SA 5728; SA 5761; SA 5770; SA 5804; SA 5805; SA 5806). The component was defined using this information and cartographic sources which indicate alignments of linear property boundaries which appear to preserve the alignment of the defences (Wood 1833; Ordnance Survey 1875a and 1875b).

**Market place** (SA 5783). The earliest documentary reference to the market is in 1271, but there was probably a market by the end of the 11th century. The identified market place is a triangular area at the south end of Bailey Street, consisting of The Cross and an area to the north delimited by Market Street. The component contains the site of a medieval market cross (SA 5703) and the findspot of medieval steelyard weights (SA 5727). The component is defined from the 1833 map (Wood 1833).

**Tenement plots** (SA 5786; SA 5787; SA 5788; SA 5789; SA 5790; SA 5791; SA 5792; SA 5793; SA 5794; SA 5795; SA 5796; SA 5797; SA 5798; SA 5799; SA

5801; SA 5801; SA 5802). A total of 17 tenement plot components are identified using documentary sources, which are particularly good for the 14th century onwards, and cartographic sources which show regular rows of tenement plots aligned on the principle streets (Wood 1833 and Ordnance Survey maps of 1875). It is possible to deduce a chronological sequence of groups of burgage plots from this information.

Documentary evidence indicates there were burgesses by *c* 1190 (Beresford and Finberg 1973, 152). It has been suggested that the earliest tenement plots were within the southern bailey of the castle (Rowley 1972, 172; see Castle component SA 5782). However it is also possible that the bailey remained an integral part of the castle in the 12th century, although it had certainly become part of the town by 1276 (Pratt 1980, 12-14). Tenement plot components are identified (SA 5786 and SA 5787) on either side of Bailey Street, and are defined by the identified alignment of the defences of the outer bailey (Watson 1988, 2; SA 5780). The tenants in Burgess Street are documented in detail in the 1393 Extent (Slack 1951, 146-7).

The town defences were constructed in the mid-13th century (see above, Town Defences) and it is probable that these indicate the maximum extent of the town at this period. Burgages along the streets within the town walls are recorded in the 1393 Extent (Slack 1951). A total of five tenement plot components are identified within the defined line of the town defences (SA 5788; SA 5789; SA 5796; SA 5797; SA 5802).

Excavation in the component east of Willow Street (SA 5796) recorded an earthfast building, with pottery dated to the 11th century, and late medieval buildings (Reynolds 1984, 12; SA 5717). Excavation in the component west of Willow Street (SA 5797) recovered part of a stone building, dated to the 15th century (SA 5710), and undated occupation evidence (SA 5714). The components within the walls contain four buildings dated to the later 15th century or early 16th century (SA 1120; SA 15101; SA 13075; SA 18712).

Documentary evidence indicates that the town had expanded beyond the line of the town defences by the late 14th century, and a total of ten tenement plot components are identified outside the walls (SA 5790; SA 5791; SA 5792; SA 5793; SA 5794; SA 5795; SA 5798; SA 5799; SA 5800; SA 5801). The Extent of 1393 records burgages outside the gate in Beatrice Street (Slack 1951, 143-5), and two tenement plot components are identified based on the 1833 map (Wood 1833; SA 5790 and 5791).

The 1393 Extent also documents burgages in Church Street (*Chirton*: Slack 1951, 150), and tenement plot components are identified on both sides of Church Street, and are defined from the 1833 map (Wood 1833; SA 5794; SA 5795; SA 5800; SA 5801). One tenement plot component in this group (SA 5795) contains a late medieval building (SA 13082) but archaeological investigation in another component (SA 5800) produced negative results (Hannaford 1991; SA 5722). Extra-mural development along Salop Road and Willow Street is not documented in the 1393 Extent, but suburbs on these streets are recorded by Leland in the early 16th century (Chandler 1993, 395-6) and are probably of late medieval origin. Tenement plots are identified on both sides of Salop Street and Willow Street outside the respective gates, and are defined from the 1833 map (Wood 1833; SA 5792; SA 5793; SA 5798; SA 5799).

The evidence for the range of crafts and industries documented in Oswestry in the medieval period has been described above (section 1.3).

**Hospital** (SA 339). Documentary evidence indicates that the Hospital of St John was founded in the early 13th century but was probably only a chapel by 1300 (VCH Shrop 4, 104-5). The location is not certain, but field-name evidence, and a reference to the chapel of St John by Leland, indicates the hospital lay south of the town

(Watkin 1920, 28-9; Chandler 1993, 394).

**Street system** (SA 5785). The medieval street system is identified from documentary and cartographic sources. The streets documented in 1393 were *Bader Strete* (Beatrice Street), *Ballium* (Bailey Street), *Lege Strete* (Leg Street), *Wyllya Strete* (Willow Street), *Midel Strete* (now part of Church Street), *Chirton* (Church Street) (Slack 1951, 143-52). The component was defined from the 1833 map (Wood 1833), together with cartographic evidence for the early alignment of Salop Street (Watkin 1920, 238-9).

### 3.3 Medieval urban form

**Definition and classification.** The medieval urban form (SA 5803) has been defined and mapped, based on the extent of the identified urban components. The limits of the urban form are well established. The available evidence indicates that the medieval urban form of Oswestry can be classified as a medium-sized market town (English Heritage 1992).

**Survival.** Archaeological excavations have taken place in Oswestry and have demonstrated the survival of buried deposits relating to the castle, town defences and tenement plot components. The depth of medieval deposits below modern ground surface has not been consistently recorded in the reports of the excavations, but excavation has shown that the town wall lies 0.40m below the modern ground surface (Worthington 1988, fig 8; SA 5808). It is likely that medieval deposits are in general buried beneath relatively thin deposits c 0.50m thick (Pratt 1980, 15).

Eight medieval buildings survive in Oswestry, including the fragmentary ruins of the castle (SA 332), and the motte survives as an impressive earthwork. The components of the medieval urban form comprising the castle, churchyard, tenement plots, market place and street system can be identified on the 1833 map (Wood 1833) and the modern town plan. However the accurate extent of the castle component and town defences, and the location and extent of the medieval hospital component, remain to be determined.

## 4 Post-medieval archaeological evidence

### 4.1 Post-medieval remains and buildings

Post-medieval deposits have been recorded at four excavations in the town, and at one just outside. Excavations in Chapel Street revealed post-medieval structural evidence (Reynolds 1984, 12; SA 5717). Post-medieval destruction deposits were recorded at excavations on the motte (Worthington 1988, site 6; SA 332) and from the ditch at its base (*ibid*, site 5; SA 5808). A stone cellar was recorded at 76 Willow Street which was dated to the post-medieval period but provided no good dating evidence (Watson 1984; SA 5719). However it is probable that post-medieval deposits have been encountered during other excavations in Oswestry, although the brief published notes provide no information on this.

A small excavation in Cae Glas Park recorded post-medieval deposits and destruction debris from the town wall (Pratt 1980, 37-9; SA 5714). These deposits appear to lie outside the town defences in land that was open ground in the post-medieval period. A large hoard of 17th century coins was discovered near the town in 1904 (SA 5701).

A total of 43 buildings dated between the 17th and late 18th centuries have been recorded. Oswestry has a modest collection of timber-framed and Georgian buildings (Pevsner 1958, 223-5).

## 4.2 Post-medieval urban components

Analysis of the evidence summarised above and of cartographic and documentary sources indicated the existence of 35 urban components. The characteristics of these urban components are summarised below.

**Open space** (SA 5809, SA 5752). Documentary evidence indicates that the castle was partly dismantled by 1602. Although it was defended during the Civil War it was comprehensively demolished by *c* 1650, when the motte became an open space (SA 5809), defined from the 1833 map (Wood 1833). Other areas of the castle inner bailey became a market place, public buildings, and tenement plots (see below).

Broad Walk was laid out with an avenue of trees in the north part of the churchyard in 1738 (see churchyard component SA 5839), and is identified as an open space (SA 5752).

**Churchyard** (SA 5839). The medieval church was used as defensive post by the Royalist garrison during the Civil War and was largely demolished. It was rebuilt in the 1670s (Watkin 1920, 62-76; SA 340). The medieval churchyard component (SA 5784) was encroached upon during the post-medieval period when buildings were built along Upper Brook Street. The extent of the post-medieval churchyard (SA 5839) is defined from the 1833 map (Wood 1833), and the eastern boundary is known to have lain slightly further east (Watkin 1920, 62).

**Chapel** (SA 5740). A Congregational Chapel was built in Arthur Street in 1750, the first non-conformist chapel in Oswestry (Watkin 1920, 171-4; SA 5740).

**Almshouse** (SA 5736). The Porkington Almshouses (SA 5736) were built on the north edge of the town in 1623, and had six houses for men and six for women (Watkin 1920, 156-8).

**Public buildings** (SA 5742, SA 5792, SA 13092). Three public buildings are identified within the urban area: two market houses, the school. These buildings are shown on Wood's 1833 map (Wood 1833).

A building called the Wool Hall is documented in Bailey Head in the late 18th century, and appears to have been a market hall (SA 5729). It was replaced by a town clerk's office and gaol in 1782 (Watkin 1920, 295).

A building called the Court House or Old Market House is documented in 1652 (which was probably the medieval court house of the castle), together with an adjacent building called the New Market House (recorded together as SA 5742).

The medieval grammar school (SA 13092) remained in use until 1772 when a new school was opened on a new site to the southwest of the town (Watkin 1920, 50-1; cf SA 13109). The former school building was used as a workhouse from 1781 until 1792 (*ibid*).

**Town defences** (SA 493). The town defences were recorded by Leland in the early 16th century but were in a ruinous state by 1602 and demolished by 1660 (Pratt 1980, 21). The four gates (SA 494; SA 495; SA 496; SA 497) remained in use but were ruinous by the 18th century and were demolished by the end of the century (*ibid*, 22-4). However it is clear that the ditch remained a landscape feature through the post-medieval period, and the streams that flowed along it were dammed and used for mills (see below, Mills SA ).

**Mills** (SA 5728, SA 5753). Two new mills were developed within the town ditch in the post-medieval period. A snuff mill (SA 5728) is documented in 1795 outside

Beatrice Gate, powered from a dam that blocked the town ditch and held a pool fed by the streams that still flowed around the defences. Part of the millwheel was recorded during construction work in 1870 (Watkin 1920, 327-8). A second mill (SA 5753) is documented in Church Street, outside the New Gate, and also powered from a millpond in the town ditch (Watkin 1920, 98).

**Market place** (SA 5783; SA 5840). The medieval market place at The Cross (SA 5783) continued in use in the medieval period. It contained a market house (SA 5762), documented in 1560, with an upper room and probably an open hall on the ground floor, and was probably demolished in the 18th century (Watkin 1920, 181-2).

Part of the former castle inner bailey (cf SA 5782) was used as a second market place in the post-medieval period, called Bailey Head or the Pitcher Bank (Watkin 1928, 300-1; SA 5840). It was the corn market in the 18th century, and contained the pillory (SA 5772), the stocks (SA 5773) and the pound (SA 5730). The area also contained two public buildings (see above, SA 5729; SA 5742).

**Tenement plots** (SA 5786; SA 5787; SA 5788; SA 5789; SA 5790; SA 5791; SA 5792; SA 5793; SA 5794; SA 5795; SA 5796; SA 5797; SA 5798; SA 5799; SA 5801; SA 5801; SA 5802; SA 5841; SA 5842; SA 5843; SA 5845; SA 5847)). The medieval tenement plot components continued in use in the post-medieval period (SA 5786; SA 5787; SA 5788; SA 5789; SA 5790; SA 5791; SA 5792; SA 5793; SA 5794; SA 5795; SA 5796; SA 5797; SA 5798; SA 5799; SA 5801; SA 5801; SA 5802). Their occupants are documented in two surveys, in 1577 and 1602 (Slack 1951). In the early 16th century the main streets were Cross Street, Bailey Street and Church Street (inside the walls), and there were four suburbs: Church Street (outside the walls), Willow Street, Beatrice Street, and Blackgate Street (Salop Street) (Chandler 1993, 395-6).

A total of five tenement plot components are identified as post-medieval in origin (SA 5841; SA 5842; SA 5843; SA 5845; SA 5847). There was limited growth beyond the defined limits of the medieval suburbs in the post-medieval period, and four components are identified on the basis of standing buildings and documentary evidence (SA 5842; SA 5843; SA 5845; SA 5847). The extent of the medieval inner bailey is uncertain (cf SA 5782), but it is probable that part of the bailey was built over in the post-medieval period (SA 5841).

Salvage recording in the tenement plot east of Willow Street (SA 5796) recorded a post-medieval stone cellar (Watson 1984; SA 5719), and post-medieval deposits have been tentatively identified elsewhere (Pratt 1980, 40; SA 5710).

**Street system** (SA 5844). The medieval street system remained in use in the post-medieval period. In the late 18th century the streets through the town were repaired and widened, and a new street was laid out southwest from Leg Street (Watkin 1920, 154, 236, 238-9).

#### 4.3 Post-medieval urban form

**Definition and classification.** The post-medieval urban form (SA 5846) has been defined and mapped, based on the extent of the identified urban components. This shows some slight expansion of the urban area from the medieval period. The available evidence indicates that the post-medieval urban form of Oswestry can be classified as a post-medieval medium-sized market town (English Heritage 1992).

**Survival.** Archaeological investigations have taken place in Oswestry although the thickness and depth of post-medieval deposits below modern ground surface has not been consistently recorded. Post-medieval deposits on the castle motte are buried

beneath up to 1.50m of modern and Victorian deposits and are over 1.0m thick (Worthington 1988, figs 9-12; SA 332). However in the rest of the town it is probable that post-medieval deposits may be encountered a short distance below the modern ground surface and may be relatively thin (Pratt 1980, 15).

A total of 43 buildings dating from the 16th to late 18th century survive in Oswestry. The components of the post-medieval urban form comprising churchyard, tenement plots, market places and street system can be readily identified. There is good survival of the post-medieval urban form to the present day.

## 5 Post-1800 archaeological evidence

The remit of the present study has not allowed for a detailed survey and assessment of the archaeological evidence relating to Oswestry in the period from 1800. Further work is required before such an assessment can be carried out. However major archaeological remains have been identified, including the railway line opened in 1848 (SA 5778; SA 5779), and the large railway yard (SA 5704) containing a railway station (SA 13103), goods shed (SA 17599), signal box (SA 18695) and railway engine works (SA 18687).

In the 19th century new public buildings were erected, including a new market hall in The Cross (SA 5763), the Guildhall (SA 18862), the National School (SA 5756), a gaol (SA 5741), a theatre (SA 13121) and a swimming pool (SA 5715). A total of ten churches and chapels are recorded (SA 5721; SA 5734; SA 5735; SA 5737; SA 5739; SA 5755; SA 5760; SA 5771; SA 5777; SA 15103). Industrial sites within the town include an agricultural works (SA 5720), a pipe kiln (SA 5726), tanneries (SA 5723), maltings (SA 5744; SA 5754; SA 5765; SA 5775; SA 5776), brewery (SA 5750), timber yards (SA 5733), and a ropewalk (SA 5774). There are 52 listed buildings dated to the 19th century within the study area.

## 6 Specialist assessments

### 6.1 Assessment of artefactual evidence J D Hurst

There is a moderate amount of artefactual evidence from Oswestry. The earliest artefacts from the study area are prehistoric (stone axe, SA 5702; Bronze Age burial urns, SA 4287; flint arrowhead, SA 5706), and Roman (coin and roof tiles, SA 5700). Medieval and post-medieval artefacts dating from the 11th century onwards have been retrieved during archaeological excavations on the town walls and castle (eg SA 5717, SA 5808). Most of the artefacts have been recovered from sites associated with the town wall.

### 6.2 Assessment of environmental evidence E A Pearson

Although several excavations have been undertaken, there has been no policy of wet-sieving samples for environmental remains. The only environmental remains recovered to date are animal bones and molluscs which have been hand-collected during excavation, and this material has not been interpreted.

**Animal bones.** Animal bones have been recovered from medieval contexts in the area of the town walls. The contexts include a stone-lined pit (SA 5710; Pratt 1980), a destruction layer beneath a cobbled surface (SA 5714; Pratt 1980) and from beneath a late medieval structure (SA 5717; Reynolds 1984). These assemblages have not been analysed in detail although species of mainly common domestic animals are listed (SA 5714 and SA 5717). Animal bones were also recovered from various post-medieval contexts during excavations at the Castle (SA 332; Worthington 1988) and have not been identified, but included an articulated dog skeleton.

**Molluscs.** Snails, oyster and mussel shells were recovered from post-medieval demolition

rubble on the castle motte (SA 332).

### **6.3 Assessment of primary documentary sources P A Stamper**

Documents relating to Oswestry are scattered among several repositories. Overall the town would appear to be moderately well-documented. The most obvious lacuna, and admittedly it is a major one, is medieval administrative records. The quality of what little does survive, generated by the administrative machine of the earls of Arundel (eg Slack 1951), shows how much has been lost. The principle groups of documentary sources have been listed (section 9).

### **6.4 Assessment of buildings R K Morriss**

The architectural evidence indicates that, prior to the mid-19th century, Oswestry was essentially a linear town laid out along the axis of Church Street and Bailey Street. These linked the castle at the top of the hill with the medieval church near to its base. A little to the south of the church was a cross-roads, with some development along either arm. Towards the top of the hill, two more streets extended west (Willow Street) and east (Cross Street), to complete the basic pattern of the pre-railway town.

The main route to Shrewsbury (before the construction of the by-pass) was along Leg Street and Salop Road, running south from Cross Street. Apart from the timber-framed Black Gate Restaurant of *c* 1600, the oldest buildings along this street, including Holy Trinity church, are of early 19th century date. This suggests that this street was redeveloped in the 19th century, although Leg Street (Blackgate Street) was clearly built up before the 16th century (section 1.3).

Virtually nothing is left of the medieval castle but its motte; however the church, much restored, is substantially intact. Clearly Oswestry was a timber-framed town though little survives on view. The early 17th century remodelled facade of the late medieval Llwyd Mansion on Cross Street (SA 1120), and the late 15th to late 16th 1-3 Church Terrace (SA 13092) are the finest of these. Most of the other timber-frames in the town are concealed by brick or render, giving a slightly unbalanced impression of the town's architectural heritage.

There are a handful of late medieval timber-framed buildings in the town, one of the earliest being the late 15th century Bell Inn (61 Church Street), much remodelled in the 18th century (SA 13082). There are probably a dozen or more post-medieval examples, all scattered around the central area with no obvious pattern. Despite this, the overall impression of Oswestry's centre is of a late Georgian town with considerable Victorian inclusions. The near-universal building material used in this fairly radical remodelling of the town was red brick. The outskirts are almost entirely of the late 19th century and later; a time when Oswestry was developing as a major railway town.

There are few obvious architectural signs of pressure on land use even in the middle of the town, and the scatter of different sizes and dates of houses in the central area indicates a fairly organic development. Most of the houses are of two or three storeys and, when built in brick, of three or more bays which are often quite widely spaced. Despite this, few of the houses in the upper town have large gardens or grounds. There are no signs of any large-scale developments and few terraces built before the mid-19th century. There is a concentration of fairly high status, detached, 18th century houses at the southern end of Church Street and on both Upper and Lower Brook Street. This may indicate that this area of the town became desirable to live in in this period.

There is a reasonable survival of buildings in the rear plots, though these have been rapidly eroded in the past few years with the opening up of areas for car-parking.

**Survey and analysis.** A few of the buildings have been studied archaeologically (eg the

Llwyd Mansion) but no synthetic study has been made.

**Assessment of the listing details.** The list is dated 1986 and is well up to the highest standards now expected, being both comprehensive, accurate, and readable. The only possible amendment concerns 57 Willow Street (SA 18715). This apparently mid-18th century brick house may be an encasing of an earlier timber-frame.

## 7 Archaeological research framework

### 7.1 Model of urban development

A model of the medieval and post-medieval town of Oswestry has been produced which is predictive and capable of testing through archaeological investigation. This model has both chronological and spatial (landuse) dimensions (see sections 2 to 6) and is based on an analysis of documentary, cartographic and archaeological sources. The model is derived from the current academic understanding of urban development in Britain, and forms one element of a developing regional research framework. The model is provisional and will be subject to confirmation or revision in the future as new information becomes available, or new studies lead to changing understandings of towns in the region.

### 7.2 Chronological framework

The archaeological and documentary evidence indicates that urban occupation commenced in the early 12th century on a new site which was continuously occupied until the present. There is little archaeological evidence to indicate early occupation at Oswestry and in the Anglo-Saxon period the settlement focus was probably at Maesbury. The erection of the castle before 1086 led to the development of a new town adjacent to the castle, probably by *c* 1100. It is logical to suppose that early settlement lay within the defences of an outer bailey of the castle, as occurred in other Marcher towns such as Caus and Clun. The earliest plots were probably those aligned on Bailey Street within the defined line of an outer bailey.

The settlement grew beyond this limit by the mid-13th century and town walls were built in the late 13th century. However the town expanded beyond the defences to form suburbs by the late 14th century. However by the 16th century the extent of the suburbs was fairly stable, and the town did not greatly expand before the end of the 18th century.

The broad outlines of this chronological framework are provisional and require testing through archaeological investigation. Destruction by besieging armies and major accidental fires are documented in 1215, 1233, 1283, 1400, 1542, 1544, 1567, 1634, and 1742. These historical events may be marked by destruction deposits stratified within buried deposits.

### 7.3 Urban landuse

The medieval and post-medieval components identified here (sections 4.2 and 5.2) have been mapped and constitute a model of urban landuse for each period. These landuse models are partial and provisional and capable of testing through archaeological investigation. The urban components of Oswestry have been archaeologically investigated in the case of the castle, the defences and tenement plot components.

**Castle.** The castle component is known from documentary sources and the surviving motte and remnants of stone keep. However the form of the keep is uncertain, and although it is clear there was a substantial ditch around the motte, the extent of this ditch and the inner bailey have not been established, and the gates and buildings of the castle have not been located.

**Town defences.** The construction and demolition of the town wall and gates is known from documentary evidence, and a number of excavations have recorded the structure of the town wall and recorded the form of the outer ditch. However despite this work and a number of chance observations and salvage records the course of the town wall is not definitely known.

**Tenement plots.** The survival of medieval stone-founded buildings has been demonstrated in Willow Street (Pratt 1980, 39-40; SA 5710) as well as earthfast buildings (Reynolds 1984; SA 5717). A chronological sequence has been outlined for the development of tenement plot components in Oswestry based on documentary and chronological evidence. However the recorded archaeological evidence relating to tenement plot components has not been fully published and therefore the potential of this data has not been fully explored.

However the medieval hospital has only been tentatively located, and although most of the post-medieval components have been located, there is limited information on their archaeological potential.

#### **7.4 Potential for survival of buried remains**

Stratified deposits have been demonstrated to exist within the urban area and some information is available on the depth of archaeological deposits. Buried remains in Oswestry have considerable potential for illuminating the development of documented industries in the town from the 12th to late 18th centuries. The continued economic importance of the town in the 19th century may have implications for the preservation of deposits throughout the urban area.

Fieldwork was undertaken by the Central Marches Historic Towns Survey in November 1994. The extent of 18th and 19th century cellarage was mapped, together with the extent of 20th century development (new buildings and major landscaping work). This showed that there was moderate cellarage along the main streets and but extensive modern redevelopment within the historic core.

It is likely that evidence for more extensive cellarage has been obscured by modern refurbishment of frontages and pavements.

#### **7.5 Potential for artefactual studies J D Hurst**

Some archaeological excavation has been undertaken in Oswestry, which has been focussed on the castle and town ditches. These deep deposit in these areas could be of special significance for the survival of artefactual evidence, as features of this type often include waterlogged finds. Substantial and well-stratified post-medieval deposits have been recorded at the castle (Worthington 1988). The large number of fires recorded in the town could be important for ceramic and other studies for the medieval period and up to the mid-18th century, if particular dated fires could be identified in the archaeological sequence.

**Period discussion.** The earliest finds are of prehistoric date, and although most of these could be regarded as stray finds, the Bronze Age urns (SA 4287) may be indicative of Bronze Age activity in the area. No details seem to be available about these unusual finds. A similar state of knowledge applies to Roman finds from The Cross (SA 5700), comprising a 4th century copper coin and Roman roof tile. The roof tile may well indicate the presence of a Roman building.

The artefactual evidence from Oswestry has been derived from a limited range of context types, mainly concentrating on the town walls (SA 5710, SA 5714, SA 5717, SA 5718), and the castle (SA 332, SA 5714, SA 5808). As a result the extent of surviving artefactual evidence in medieval and later deposits in the interior of the town cannot yet be assessed in

any detail. Much of the medieval material from the town ditches and castle is residual as it is derived from later deposits, and so the quality of medieval artefactual evidence in Oswestry could only be provisionally assessed from the limited amount of available archaeological evidence.

The medieval pottery assemblages from individual sites have been small (and in some cases unquantified), amounting to a total of about 500 medieval sherds overall. Much of this material, with the most notable exception of an assemblage summarily described by Reynolds (1984; SA 5717), is probably residual. There has been little attempt to identify medieval fabric types, and so, for instance, the 11th pottery mentioned by Reynolds (1984) is not specified to type. Comparison with other site assemblages from outside Oswestry has been made, as in the case of the medieval ceramics from SA 5808 which has been regarded as similar to the assemblage from Hen Domen (Worthington 1988, 10). Some of the later medieval pottery has been referred to as probably of local origin (Pratt 1980, 37).

A small assemblage of post-medieval pottery is known from SA 5718, 5714, and the castle (SA 332 and SA 5808). In both the latter cases Buckley wares were identified (Pratt 1980; Worthington 1988), and Pratt (1980) also lists a wide range of other post-medieval ware types. The thickness of post-medieval deposits and their well-stratified character at the castle (SA 332) suggests that they hold considerable potential for the study of post-medieval ceramic development in Oswestry and north Shropshire, especially for the Civil War period.

**Comparison with secondary documentary evidence.** Secondary sources list a large number of occupations in the town from the late medieval period onwards. Cloth was a major trade in the late medieval period (Mendenhall 1953), and later bleaching, bell founding, leather-working, weaving, and tiling are all attested. Though some these industries are notable for not leaving a great deal of artefactual evidence in the archaeological record, others such as bell founding generally survive well in this way.

## 7.6 Environmental archaeology E A Pearson

There has been only a small amount of fieldwork carried out in the town, and no wet-sieving of samples for environmental remains. Therefore opportunities for recovering biological remains has been limited, and the full potential for recovery of environmental remains and research is therefore largely unknown.

Although organic remains have not been recorded during excavations to date, they may survive alongside watercourses and ditches associated with the castle, town defences, and related post-medieval fishponds. This material may provide information relating to the surrounding environment and to dumped occupational rubbish. The soils are likely to be slightly acidic and would not normally provide good conditions for the preservation of faunal remains such as animal bone and molluscs. However, there is evidence for the survival of animal bones from several excavations, although the limited reporting on them gives little indication of the quality and quantity of preservation.

Environmental remains providing information on the occupation of the town may be recovered from, for example, the tenement plots, and if buried soils are sealed beneath the earthworks of the castle, it may be possible to investigate the previous use of the land (for example, whether the land was under cultivation or pastureland) using soil micromorphology and pollen analysis. In some cases there may be little other archaeological evidence for the previous use of the land. Major fires in the town would have provided ideal conditions for exceptional preservation of environmental remains such as timbers and cereal crop remains. In particular, fire destruction deposits may be found around the area of St Oswald's Church where large-scale destruction occurred. As 500 people died of plague in 1559, any evidence of mass graves may relate to plague victims.

As only a narrow range of types of environmental remains have been recovered in

Oswestry, any further environmental material would be of interest. This could provide information on the past environment, diet, living conditions and agricultural or industrial economy. Future excavation should include a policy of sampling and wet-sieving deposits in order to recover plant, insect, molluscs and small animal remains in conjunction with hand-collection of larger items. Where appropriate, specialist sampling for soil and pollen analysis may be required.

### **7.7 Potential for study of standing buildings R K Morriss**

As an important Marcher town with a larger number of timber-framed buildings than might initially appear to be the case, Oswestry is deserving of a general but comprehensive architectural study. This should, initially, concentrate of the surviving timber-framed stock.

### **7.8 Summary of research potential**

The historic core of Oswestry contains buried archaeological deposits, and these are judged to have high potential. In addition there is moderate potential for the recovery of artefact and ecofact assemblages. The historic buildings constitute a complementary body of evidence, and are judged to have high potential for detailed study and recording. The surviving documentary sources are reasonably extensive and consequently there is moderate potential for further study.

## **8 Management framework**

### **8.1 Urban archaeological area**

The mapped extent of the medieval and post-medieval urban forms defined above indicated the extent of the urban area (Oswestry Urban Archaeological Area).

### **8.2 Existing protection measures**

The different parts of the urban area are afforded different measures of protection through legislation and the planning process. Directly relevant measures are outlined below.

**Scheduled ancient monuments.** There are three Scheduled Ancient Monuments in Oswestry, comprising Llywd Mansion (Shrop 138; SA 1120), the castle (Shrop 203; SA 332) and Wat's Dyke (Shrop 343; SA 1001: scheduled area not mapped in this report). It is possible that following the current Monuments Protection Programme, English Heritage may add other monuments in Oswestry to the schedule.

**Listed buildings.** There is a total of 93 buildings listed for their historic or architectural importance within the urban area. Although unlisted, many other buildings are of considerable historic importance. The management of all historic buildings requires special care and attention, while the management of Listed Buildings is especially important. Listed Buildings are protected under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and unauthorised alteration is a serious offence. This protection is also likely to preserve archaeological remains under and around such buildings and it is important that archaeological and historic building matters are considered together.

In Oswestry District, specialist advice on the management of historic buildings is provided by the District Council with support from the County Council. Some grant aid is available for the repair of historic buildings and information and advice is available from the District Council Conservation Officer.

**Conservation Area.** A Conservation Area has been defined which partially

encompasses the archaeological area (Oswestry Borough Local Plan: consultation draft (1993)).

### 8.3 Management approach

The archaeological urban area of Oswestry probably contains buried remains relating to medieval and post-medieval occupation, associated with contemporary buildings. The buried remains may vary in complexity and depth, but probably contain significant archaeological information. It is desirable that any proposed development within the urban area that has a potential impact on earthworks or buried remains should be assessed by the appropriate archaeological body.

The course of action recommended will depend upon the nature of the development and current planning legislation and frameworks. The archaeological response will be based on both the archaeological information summarised in this document and any subsequent archaeological information recorded on the County Sites and Monuments Record.

## 9 Principal groups of documentary sources compiled by P A Stamper

(SRO: Shropshire Record Office; NLW: National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth)

- SRO 1043 The Borough of Oswestry Collection. Includes mid-18th century manorial court papers. Also late 16th to 18th century rentals, surveys of 1652-3 and later, and miscellaneous other papers (eg concerning demolition of town gates in 18th century)
- SRO 484 Reasonably sized family (Venables) collection of deeds and other papers. Also includes a little borough and Tailor's Guild material
- SRO 867 Deeds and other papers  
& 14488
- SRO 3965 Parish records. Includes registers from 1558; churchwardens' accounts 1579 to 1616 and from 1720; and glebe terriers of 1685, 1791 and 1793
- SRO 3965 Tithe map; altered apportionment (1872)
- NLW Aston Hall All these collections, especially Aston Hall, contain material relating to Oswestry
- NLW Brogynton
- NLW Chirk Castle
- NLW Wynnstay

*Arundel Castle, Arundel*

Steer's catalogue to the collections, vol 4, lists eight compoti rolls 1494-1556 of the lordship of Oswestry, and a court roll of 1582-3 of the manor of Oswestry

*Shrewsbury Local Studies Library*

Burgesses book, 1696-1834 (xerox, classmark q F45)

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## 12 Mapping

The illustrations for this report comprise CAD plots of the urban components for each period and a location plot of archaeological remains combined with OS digital map data (1995) at 1:5000. These plots are current at the date of the completion of this report (March 1995). After this date new information will be held by the Shropshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record.

- \* Historic buildings (listed and other recorded buildings) and urban area
- \* Archaeological remains and urban area
- \* Medieval urban form and components
- \* Post-medieval urban form and components
- \* Urban area and scheduled ancient monuments