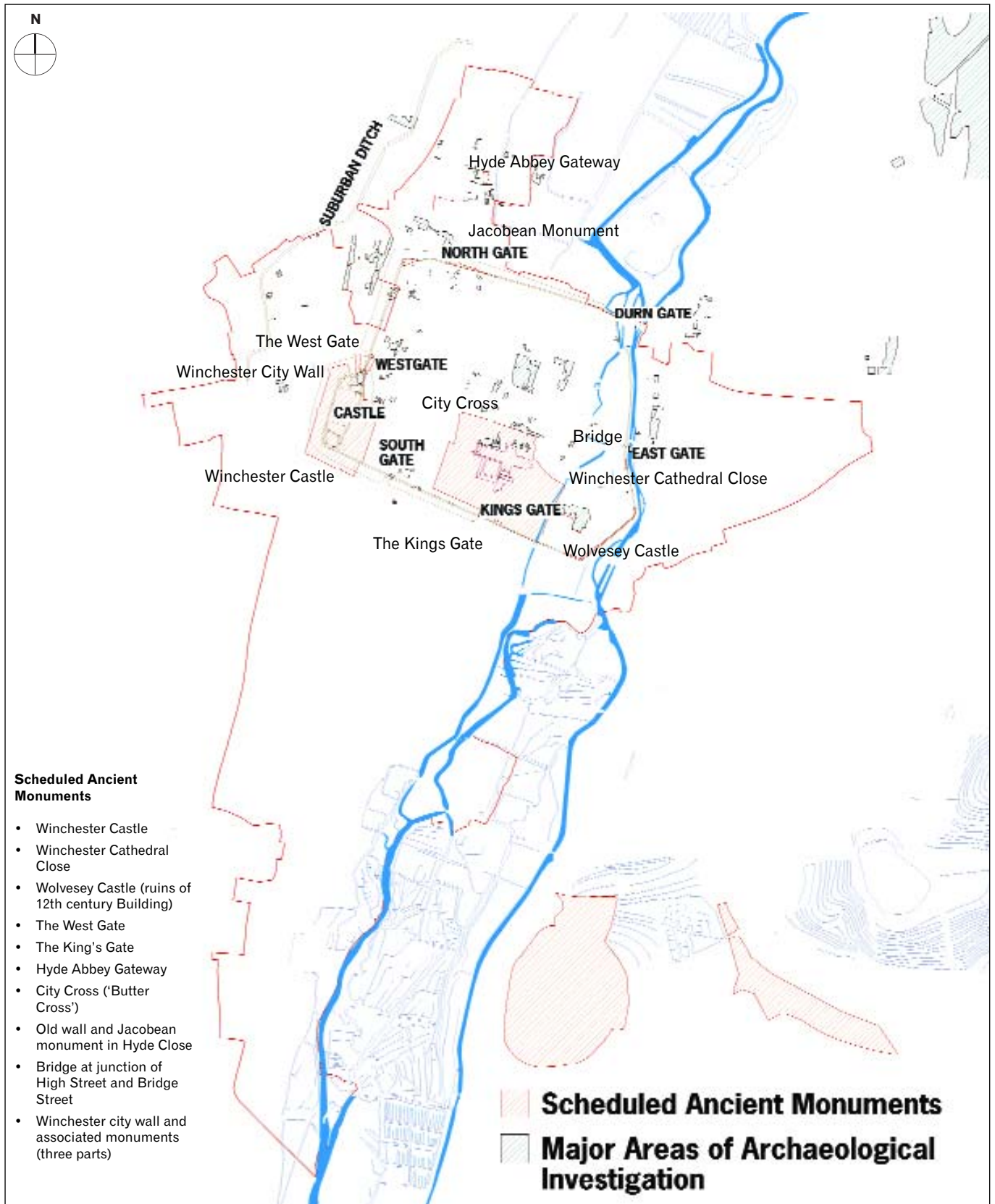


# 3 The Archaeology of Winchester



Scheduled Ancient Monuments and sites of archaeological explorations shown over outline of medieval city walls. Modern Conservation Area boundary and watercourses shown for orientation.

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### 3.1 City archaeology

Winchester has one of the richest histories of any city in Britain. This has been informed by the combination of below-ground archaeology, the analysis of standing buildings, and the study of historic documents. From the establishment of the Iron Age earthworks at Oram's Arbour and St Catherine's Hill, to the establishment of the civitas capital Venta Belgarum in the Roman period, Wintanceaster in the Saxon period, through "medieval" to modern-day Winchester, occupation and activity in the immediate area can be traced back thousands of years.

Much of the existing knowledge on Winchesters' past has come through historical sources. Texts written by the ancient historians, Ptolemy and Bede, for example, mention Winchester. Further information relating specifically to Winchester includes two 12th century surveys of the City, and a large series of surviving documents for the later medieval period (1300-1550). Archaeology has the ability to quantify and qualify these written sources. Extensive archaeological excavation in the 1960s and 1970s in Winchester has revealed much. Work in the town centre in the 1960s included dating the Iron Age enclosure, and defining its extent. The Roman defences, together with streets, houses and other buildings, including the forum, and a temple, were explored. The Anglo-Saxon Minster was fully excavated (save for that part under the existing cathedral). The castle was partially excavated, as well as two churches, three chapels and twelve medieval houses.

Work in the 1970s was chiefly based in the suburbs. The existing knowledge of Oram's Arbour was further enhanced. The North Gate end of the Cirencester Road was studied in detail, together with Roman cemeteries and other development based along it. Several early cemeteries on the outskirts of the City have also been located and investigated. Early medieval development of suburbs to the north and west were also excavated. The bulk of this excavation was in response to development.

Although archaeological investigations continued through the 1980s and 1990s in both the historic core and in the suburbs, there is much more that could be revealed. Any future development of the City must take this into consideration. Knowledge of pre-Roman occupation of the area is still sparse. Between Oram's Arbour and St Catherine's Hill lies modern Winchester. It is possible that there were links between the two, across what was then marshland. The water table is high enough to allow waterlogged deposits to survive. There are significant gaps in the known Roman activity at Winchester. No trace of an early fort has yet been located. Nor have the sorts of civic amenities such as baths and temples that a town of this size would perhaps be expected to have. There are no written sources in prehistory, so archaeology alone can reveal ancient Winchester. Over all pre-Roman and Roman layers lie deep and complex Saxon and medieval deposits.

Future development will have to bear in mind the exceptional richness of the archaeology of Winchester, mentioned above. Planning Policy Guidance Note 16, 1990, which placed archaeology within the planning framework, recommends the preservation of finds in situ. The Winchester District Local Plan, currently under review, will include policies relating to the treatment of the historic environment. The forthcoming English Heritage, sponsored Urban Archaeology Strategy, will also inform future responses to the effects of development upon the town's archaeology.