

## Self-Guided Walk

## Wallingford Castle Meadows



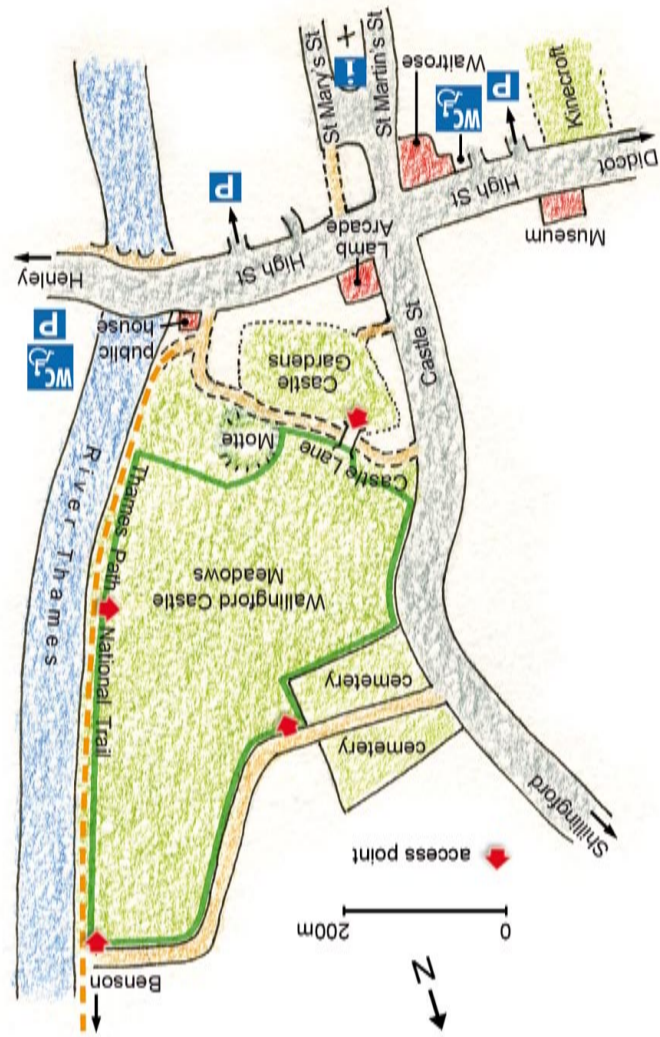
INVESTOR IN PEOPLE  
POSITIVE ABOUT PEOPLE  
www.southoxon.gov.uk  
Viewed at:  
A copy of the site management plan can be

Please help us to protect Wallingford Castle Meadows by respecting the grounds and earthworks, keeping to the paths, and taking your litter home. Please keep dogs on leads when cattle are grazing the meadows and use the dog bin provided. Thank you.

Neighbourhood Wildlife Warden,  
Hill Farm, Little Wittenham,  
ABINGDON, Oxon OX14 4QZ  
Tel: 01865 407792 Mobile: 07982 218493  
Email: admin@northmoortrust.co.uk  
Web: www.northmoortrust.co.uk



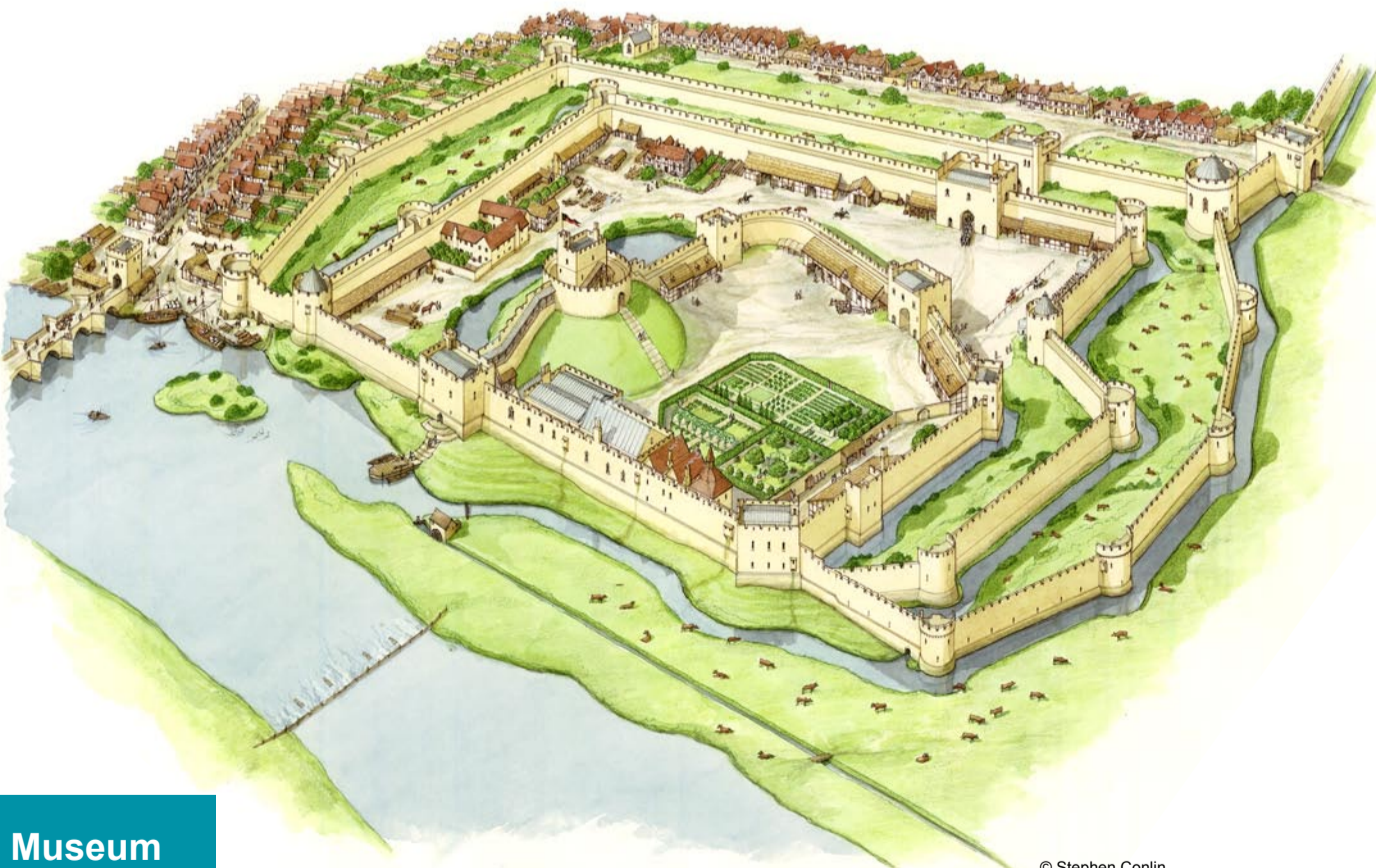
Leisure and Economic Development,  
Benson Lane, Crowmarsh Gifford,  
WALLINGFORD, Oxon OX10 8QX  
Tel: 01491 823124 Fax: 01491 823015  
Email: leisure@southoxon.gov.uk



South Oxfordshire District Council bought Wallingford Castle Meadows in 1999 to preserve this important area for public benefit.  
The site is managed by the Northmoor Trust who believe that understanding the links between the landscape and our everyday lifestyles and actions is at the heart of an environmentally sustainable future.

## Introduction

Wallingford Castle occupies a quarter of the largest Saxon fortified town in England and its ramparts include part of the Saxon town walls. William the Conqueror and his army crossed the Thames at Wallingford in 1066 and ordered the building of the castle. Over the next six centuries it dominated the Thames Valley, standing firm through two civil wars and several royal intrigues! It was home or host to many of the medieval Kings and Queens of England and today the remains of its massive earthworks are still capable of evoking an extraordinary sense of history.



## Museum

Wallingford Castle, with the early medieval town, is the subject of a current major archaeological and documentary research project. For all the latest findings and a full history of the town and castle visit Wallingford Museum in the High Street.

**Opening hours:** Tuesday–Friday & Holiday Monday 1400–1700, Saturday 1030–1700, Sunday (June–August only) 1400–1700. **(Closed December–February)**

## Get involved!

Volunteers from Wallingford Green Gym have undertaken a range of practical tasks on the site, from coppicing through to construction. For contact details and more information on how to improve your health and the environment at the same time see the Green Gym website at [www.btcv.org.uk](http://www.btcv.org.uk) or look for the timetable at the entrance gates.

Northmoor Trust volunteers also regularly get involved in practical conservation tasks on the meadows. For these and other volunteering opportunities see the Northmoor Trust website or phone 01865 407792.



## Events

Every year we run a programme of exciting events at Wallingford Castle Meadows. See the notice boards at the entrance gates for details or contact the Northmoor Trust.

**Amidst this rural landscape, watched over by the circling red kites, it is hard to imagine that you are standing in one of the greatest medieval castles in England. We hope that this brief guide will bring the green mounds to life for you.**

**1** First get your bearings: directly ahead (south) is a piece of standing masonry that marks the approximate line of the inner wall of the castle. Behind it, capped by a group of large trees, is the huge motte (mound) – the heart of the late 11th century castle. In front of you the path crosses a deep ditch, once water-filled, which was first dug by Saxons in the 9th century as part of the defences of their town. To your right runs the rampart of the second castle wall on which you are standing.

Turn round to face north. Ahead is the ditch that was once the second moat. The crest of the next rampart carried the third wall of the castle and beyond lay the outermost moat. You should be able to make out an earthen outwork from the 17th century Civil War.

**Now walk south across the Saxon ditch to the piece of masonry (Point 2)**

**2** This fragment may be the remains of a castle building. It stands on what was the edge of the inner bailey, the bustling central courtyard of the castle. The Norman motte dominates the courtyard: when capped by its original stone tower it must have been a formidable sight. Imagine the bustle and noise of medieval daily life here: the smells of the bakery, the shouts of men, the neighing of horses, and the hammering of armourers.

As you walk to Point 3, notice the line of the iron fence to your right. This roughly marks the original entrance to the castle, which cut through the 12th and 13th century outer fortifications, and was probably flanked by great towers.

**3** Here the motte towers above you while the inner moat lies below. Beyond (now on the other side of Castle Lane with its fine brick walls) lies the middle bailey of the castle. This extension to the Norman castle was probably built for the Empress Matilda in the 12th century Civil War.

The surrounding ramparts were once capped with high stone walls. To the left, partly hidden by summer foliage, you can glimpse the stone remains of the College of St Nicholas, once guardian of the King's chapel in the castle.

A Victorian mansion was built in the middle bailey in 1837, with St Nicholas as its summerhouse. The house would have totally dominated the view until its demolition in 1972.

The castle moat below you remains wet most of the year. It would have been stocked with fish in the past to provide food for the castle garrison.

**A few yards further on there is a fenced area to your right. Walk down the slope outside the fence to a small gate near the ditch. Go through the gate to Point 5.**

**5** It is likely that somewhere here the castle moats were originally controlled by sluices which could be emptied into the low-lying meadow area.

In the 1800's, the Victorians created this grotto, and planted the banks with various 'exotic' plants, including snowdrops, bluebells and cotoneaster. Frogs, herons, moorhens and wagtail are to be seen at times. The shallow edges, exposed mud and waterlogged wood are all good for invertebrates. Pond dipping here is fun, but the mud is very deep, so please take care and always keep children under supervision.

**6** The water-meadows that divide the castle from the River Thames were essential for providing food for the castle's animals, and in later years, the burgesses of Wallingford had grazing rights for their cattle here.

**7** The two sentry-like Wellingtonias mark the limit of our walk. Be sure to feel their spongy red bark. Lastly, look back at the castle. The buildings are long gone, torn down in 1652 by Oliver Cromwell, six years after the last great siege of the Civil War, but take a moment to imagine the outline of the great turreted walls, and the motte crowned by its massive tower – a formidable place indeed.



**Walk to Point 4 by following the path along the base of the motte. The river will come into view ahead and the path will bear left to take you to Point 4.**

**4** The fragment of stonework in front of you is all that is left of the riverside wall of the castle. It retains a small section of dressed stone – once part of a window. Known locally as 'Queen's Tower', this stonework may have been part of the private apartments of the castle.

**Continue along the path to Point 7, observing the trees as you go.**

**7** The two sentry-like Wellingtonias mark the limit of our walk. Be sure to feel their spongy red bark. Lastly, look back at the castle. The buildings are long gone, torn down in 1652 by Oliver Cromwell, six years after the last great siege of the Civil War, but take a moment to imagine the outline of the great turreted walls, and the motte crowned by its massive tower – a formidable place indeed.