

THE SOUTHAMPTON EXCAVATIONS:**Second Interim Report, 1947.**

By M. R. MAITLAND MULLER, B.A.

Organisation. The trial excavations of 1946 (*P.H.F.C.*, Vol. XVII, 1949, pp. 65-71) confirmed the great potentialities of the Saxon town of Hamwih for archaeological research which the records of its history and the former discoveries on the site had led one to expect. So I formed a small Excavation Committee to facilitate the research. It consisted of:—

N. Cook, Esq., F.S.A., representing The Tudor House Museum Southampton, and Technical Adviser.

O. G. S. Crawford, Esq., F.B.A., representing The Hampshire Field Club & Archaeological Society and The Friends of Old Southampton.

Rev. Canon S. S. G. Leeson, M.A. (now Bishop of Peterborough).

M. R. Maitland Muller, Esq., B.A., Director of Excavations.

Professor H. Rothwell, representing University College, Southampton.

A. G. Steavenson, Esq., M.A.

Acknowledgments. Excavations were continued on the Saxon site for the first two weeks of April and four weeks of August 1947.

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Boring. During the 19th century disturbance was caused on the site of the Saxon town by the digging of the natural clay for brick earth, and to some extent the sinking of household rubbish pits and sewers.

Referring to the brick earth digging, it is stated in 1855 : " The labourers employed in digging obtained the clay from the spaces left untouched between the holes [Saxon pits], and the rubbish taken from the holes was afterwards used in levelling the ground." (Roach Smith, *Coll. Ant.*, IV, p. 61.)

Thus the level of the natural clay was lowered, destroying the Saxon ground surface.¹ Hence, where this has happened the only extant ancient remains are the pits of which at least the lower portions are intact in the natural clay and underlying natural gravel.

The aim of a study of the site must therefore be to find an undisturbed area or failing this to locate the Saxon pits with the minimum expenditure of effort in order either to excavate them or, where this is not possible owing to building development plans, to map them. Boring with a sampler would appear to be an obvious method despite the difficulties of technique and interpretation of the sample sections obtained. By this means the dark variegated fillings of Saxon pits can be distinguished from the clean natural orange clay and gravel into which they cut.

A trial was made with a pod auger taking samples 6 inches in diameter and about 9 inches long. The problems were found to be :

- (1) the difficulty of getting through the top 2 feet of made soil which is liberally sprinkled with bricks and cobble stones—this was probably in the main due to the large diameter of the instrument ;
- (2) the sample was churned up by the blades of the auger so that thin layers of different soil would tend to be lost.

Experiments in boring will be continued with more suitable equipment : such as a solid screw auger to get through the top 2 feet and a different type of sampler, both of small diameter.

Structures. The excavations were continued on the southern end of the Kingsland site (at XI on the map, fig 2, *P.H.F.C.* Vol. XVII, 1949, p. 69). Here the main feature was a row of structures cutting into each other lengthwise in the following chronological order from west to east : a square pit (13) and two consecutive rectangular ones (15 and 16).² (See fig. 1. p. 128)

(I) Pit 13 consisted of a hole about 5 feet square with rounded corners, and cut at least 6 feet 6 inches³ through the natural clay

1. Notwithstanding this a great part of the remains is intact because the site was spared 1000 years of mediaeval and modern occupation. The pit fillings are in fact often found to rise considerably above the present level of the natural clay despite the alleged spreading of the exposed fillings referred to above.

2. The third pit (16) was that termed Hut II in the 1946 Interim Report. The rectangular pits with stratified layers of occupation debris had been termed huts in accordance with prevailing usage, but it now (1949) seems more likely that they were cellars inside houses or shelters built above ground, the post holes of which have been destroyed by the brick earth digging.

into the natural gravel. This was then lined with a packing of clean "natural" orange clay and gravel about a foot wide. In the centre was thus formed a round pit, the base of which ran into the natural gravel about a foot deeper than the surrounding packing and contained a scatter of fist-sized stones. This pit was 2 feet 6 inches in diameter at the base and narrowed to 2 feet at 5 feet up. It was filled with mixed deposits of gravel and grey clay. A chocolate coloured deposit at the bottom of the central pit was probably the remains of some kind of wooden revetment (for in a similar type of pit remains of the actual wood *in situ* of such a revetment were found in 1949). There were no finds in either the outer packing or the filling of the central pit except two small fragments of bone from the latter.

At the east end of the site two more pits were partially examined. One in the south-east corner and much disturbed was apparently of similar structure and appeared to be most probably Saxon. The other (Pit 17, the excavation of which was completed in 1949) was of identical type to Pit 13 though no definite demarcation could be observed between the filling of the central pit and the overlying modern debris.

The use of these pits is unknown, a possible though not very convincing explanation is that they were latrines.

(II) The two pits (15 and 16) were both roughly rectangular. The earlier of the two (Pit 15) cut back into the elaborate Pit 13. It measured at least 11 feet long and 6 feet deep, and about 6 feet wide. The filling consisted of a succession of thin layers of alternating clean gravel or clay, and grey clay containing occupation debris. This stratification included two very thick medial and final layers of burnt daub which contained a few fragments of both burnt and unburnt bone.

A hoard of sceattas (see p. 128) lay beneath the lower burnt daub deposit in a grey layer which appeared to have been hardened and discoloured by heat.

Pit 16 cut into the end of the pit (15) just described. It measured about 13 feet long, 7 feet wide and 5 feet deep. As described in the 1946 Interim Report the filling consisted of an unstratified agglomeration of deposits of clay and gravel, capped by a thick layer of occupation debris, the top being apparently much disturbed in modern times.

Two more pits were located: the end of one (Pit 14) which cut into the square Pit 13 on the side opposite to Pit 15; the other, a rectangular pit (18) which was partially explored, lay about 10 yards north of the above structures.

3. Regarding the depth in the virgin rock, it must be remembered that owing to the destruction of the old land surface it is uncertain how much of the tops of the pits may have been destroyed.

Finds. The pottery was similar to that already discovered in 1946: coarse hand-made native Saxon, and wheel turned and roulette decorated Frankish wares. The small finds included part of a bone comb, a bronze bramble-headed pin (both Plate II facing p. 129), bun-shaped loom-weights, spindle whorls, fragments of Niedermendig lava, and of glass which is described as "the first group of Late Saxon period glass to be recognised from this country."

A most important find is the hoard (in Pit 15) of 23 sceattas in a pile (*Num. Chron.*, 6th S., Vol. VI, 1946, p. 73.) with two and a possible third scattered 18 inches away. The two types present are illustrated on Plate II, where are also shown the chronologically significant objects which were stratified above and below the hoard.

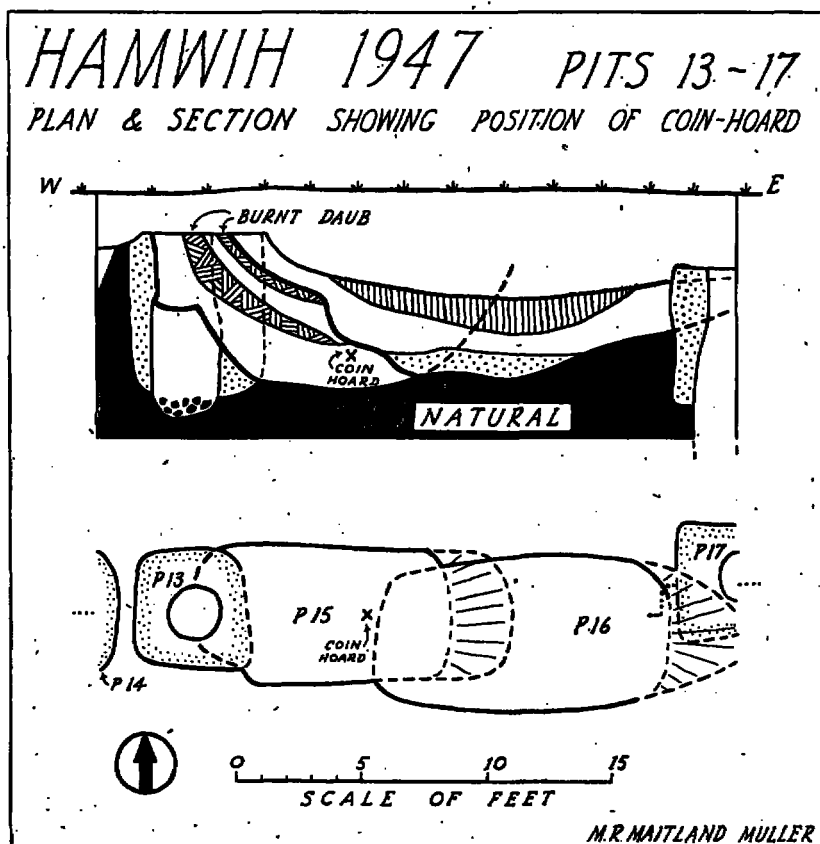
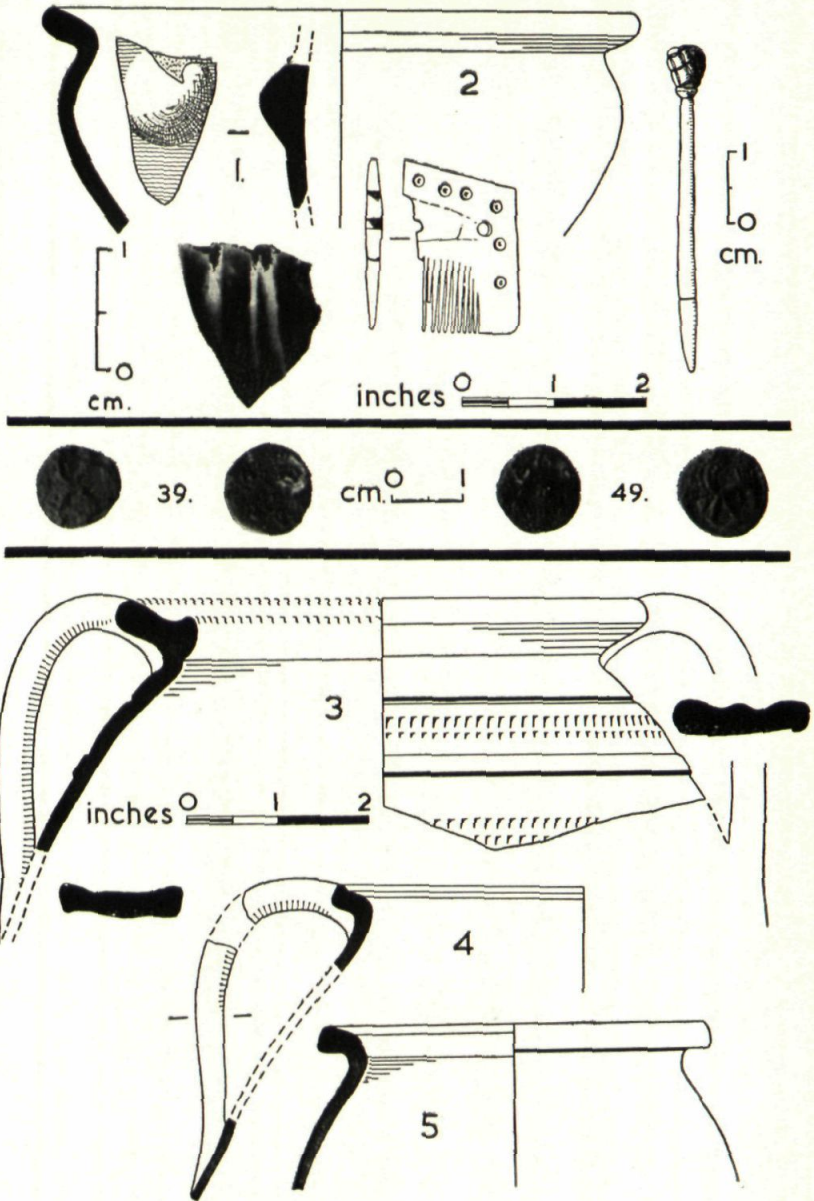


Fig. 1.

PLATE II



There are three sceattas of "London" type (B.M. Cat. of Anglo-Saxon coins, type-39) and twenty-two of "Woden-monster" type (B.M.C., 49). The latter is probably of Frisian origin. Both types are possibly late in the development of the sceatta series. (*Vide* C. H. V. Sutherland, "Anglo-Saxon Sceattas in England: Their Origin, Chronology and Distribution," *Num. Chron.*, 6th S., Vol. II, 1942, pp. 42-70). This and the nature of the pottery and the other finds would make a date of 700 - 750 A.D. appear reasonable for the hoard.

Bibliography. To the bibliography for Saxon Southampton given at the end of the 1946 Interim Report should now be added The Provisional Summary of the work from 1946-48 and at Easter 1949 published in *The Archaeological News Letter*, May and July 1949 respectively; and O. G. S. Crawford, "Trinity Chapel and Fair," *P.H.F.C.*, Vol. XVII, 1949, pp. 45-53, which includes a map of the possible field bounds of Hamwih.

Significant Objects Stratified above and below the Hoard of Sceattas. (Illustrated in Plate II.)

ABOVE.

- Comb:** Bone toilet comb with incised ring-and-dot motifs, 8th century with a leaning perhaps towards the latter half. (Pit 15.)
- Glass:** (i) Fragment of the body of a vessel of deep ruby-coloured glass with opaque yellow trailed spiral threads not marvered in. Carolingian. (Pit 15.)
- (ii) (Not illustrated.) Fragment of the body of a vessel of green glass with streaks of reddish tinge. Carolingian, c. 9th century. (Pit 16.)⁴
- Pin:** Bronze with brambled head and shaft thickened towards the point. (Pit 16.)⁴
- Pottery:** (Not illustrated.) Part of the base and side of a large vessel, medium hard buff ware, wheel turned with corrugated interior, exterior covered with broad (average 1 in. wide) vertical knife cuts. (Pit 15.)
- (1) Fragment with applied boss, hard white ware with bluish surfaces, wheel turned. (Pit 15.)
- (2) Fine hard white ware, wheel turned. (Pit 16.)⁴

HOARD OF 25 SCEATTAS: Three of B.M. Cat. of Anglo-Saxon Coins, Type 39: ob. fantastic bird, rev. "Celtic" cross; and twenty-two of Type 49: ob. face surrounded by annulets, rev. fantastic bird.

BELOW.

- Pottery:** (3) Medium hard cream-coloured ware, wheel turned, sharply-cut groove and cord on shoulder alternating with square roller-stamp impressions which are also found on the flanged rim. One handle only preserved—the vessel probably originally had two, together with a spout.
- (4) Handled vessel of same fabric as No. 1, and probably same type as No. 3.⁵
- (5) Medium hard buff ware fired to a dark brown to black on the exterior and rim, wheel turned.⁵

4. So could be derived from anywhere in Pit 15.

5. From the layer in which the coins were found.