

SOUTHAMPTON EXCAVATIONS, 1956

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Part I. Preliminary Report

THIS year, two sites have been explored by the Friends of Old Southampton, one being to the north of Bargate Street, and the other at the corner of Vyse Lane and Bugle Street. Grants were received from H.M. Ministry of Works and Southampton Corporation. A large number of volunteers participated at various times and two paid labourers were employed for the duration of the excavation.

At the Vyse Lane site two trenches were dug. The first of these produced traces of an early mediaeval wall, but dating of this will be difficult since only a small length was uncovered and it was not possible to follow it due to restrictions imposed by the architects for the re-development of the area. This wall had been cut by the building trench of a later wall whose date would appear to be of the late XVth century. It was substantially built of roughly squared stone and was about 2ft. in width. The upper structure would appear to have been rebuilt at some later date. Unfortunately, the remainder of this trench had been disturbed in Tudor times and any floors or occupation relating to this building would appear to have been removed. Above this disturbed area were the foundations of an XVIIIth century house. There were also a number of mediaeval rubbish pits in this trench and one pit which produced some interesting and unusual pottery, for which parallels have yet to be found in order to date it.

In the same area a large mediaeval cesspit was uncovered. This produced a large quantity of wood fragments, including pieces of bowls. It also contained a great amount of pottery, some of which seems to be imported French ware of XIIIth century date, and a 'face' jug.

The other site to be investigated north of Bargate Street, where a large trench was dug, was intended to uncover, if possible, a portion of the town ditch. At this point there is documentary evidence for a double ditch and it was hoped to section the outer of these two ditches. At the present time it would be unwise to say that the ditch has been found before further work can be done on it. If a ditch was here, it was extremely shallow and must have relied largely on the natural slope of the ground upwards to the north. Certainly one of the most noteworthy features was the lateness of the filling, which cannot be dated much earlier than the XVIth or XVIIth centuries.

To the north of the line of the possible ditch and dug into the natural sandy loam was an early rubbish pit, which produced fragments of imported Carolingian wares, dating perhaps to the IXth or Xth centuries.¹

In the filling of the supposed ditch was a crucifix, complete except for feet and arms. The workmanship is very good and it would seem to be of late mediaeval date, but confirmation of this must be sought.

Grateful thanks must be accorded Mr. Burgess, Hon. Treasurer, and Mr. Morgan, Hon. Secretary, for all their help in organising the excavation, and to Mr. Peberdy, Curator of the Tudor House Museum, for putting numerous facilities at our disposal.

Part II. Preliminary Report on 2nd Season's work

Following the discovery during July of a late Saxon pit in the area of the Bargate Street temporary car-park, it was decided to take advantage of the delay in building operations and explore the site further. This was made possible by the receipt of an additional grant by H.M. Ministry of Works.

During the three weeks when digging took place, further trenches were cut in the car-park area and the opportunity was also taken of trenching the higher level terrace at the back of Pirelli's tyre depot (*i.e.* on the western side of Spa Road at its southern end).

The two excavations in the car park revealed little to add to the knowledge of the Saxon occupation of the area. However, at one point, lying on the natural gravel were some large sherds of late Bronze Age/early Iron Age pottery. No structures could be found relating to these finds, but from the variety of fragments it would seem that they came from occupation of the site and not from an isolated burial.

On the higher terrace, two trenches were dug. These revealed a small V-shaped ditch which was filled in during the 14th century, and running parallel with it to the south, but not necessarily connected with it in any way, was a sleeper beam trench with two related post holes. It was not possible in the time available to follow either of these features to their extremities. The dating of both must remain obscure for the time being, as no evidence is as yet available.

1. Further examination of this pottery shows that it is of late XI or early XII century date. Some fragments are remarkably similar to the Carolingian types referred to. As yet, parallels have not been found for this pottery at this later date. It is possibly an import from the Low Countries. It occurred with imported ware from Normandy.

Probably the most important discovery was a rectangular pit of which only one end has so far been uncovered. Related to this was a series of post holes and it would seem from this and from the pottery from the filling that it must be part of a late Saxon cellar.² Time did not allow the full excavation of the contents, but it has been partially filled in to preserve it and work will continue on it next year, when it is hoped to recover the full dimensions.

2. This pottery from the filling of this cellar or storage pit would suggest a late XI century date. Nothing was found from which the date of the digging of the pit could be obtained.