

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT CHARLOTTE PLACE, SOUTHAMPTON

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of archaeological investigations in 2003 at the Charlotte Place roundabout, adjacent to the St Mary's Road sites described by Garner in Hampshire Studies 58. The site is located on the north-west outskirts of the Middle Saxon town of Hamwic and close to an area of known Iron Age and Romano-British activity. Six Middle Saxon pits were found: three clustered in the centre of the site, and three more widely distributed in the south-east part. Twenty-three undated pits and smaller features may be Iron Age or Saxon, and one medieval pit and a post-hole were also found. Finds included Middle Saxon pottery and domestic refuse, and evidence of textile production and fragments of waterlogged wood, including a stake, were also recovered. A Saxon glass bead was recovered from a soil sample. Environmental evidence suggests the site was not intensively exploited and may have been on the periphery of Hamwic, or even outside the settlement.

INTRODUCTION

Project background

An archaeological evaluation, SOU 965, comprising four trenches was carried out on this site by Southampton City Archaeology Unit in 1999 (Garner 1999, 2–17). This investigation uncovered four probable Middle Saxon pits in the south-east corner of the car park. In 2003 Southern Archaeological Services Ltd were appointed by Urban Innovations, of Belfast, to carry out an investigation consisting of the evaluation of the central area of the car park and full excavation of the eastern part in advance of development for a hotel and residential use. The site was allocated code SOU 1281.

The aims of the project were to assess the archaeological potential of the west and central parts of the site and to preserve by record any archaeological features and deposits threatened by the development (Whitehead 2003, 2). Archaeologically significant remains were defined as 'relating to pre-19th century human use of the area' (SCC 2003, 3). The evaluation revealed a cluster of features in the centre of the site, so a watching brief on groundworks for was also carried out.

Site background

Written records and maps show that the site was used for agriculture from the end of the Saxon period to about 1800, and that a pond called 'Dysettespool' lay on or near the west edge of the site (Blake 1981, lxxx). Nearby sites have produced medieval evidence in the form of scattered finds and remnant agricultural soils (Garner 2003).

In the early decades of the 19th century the site was developed as Charlotte Place, with three east-west streets of terraced houses (from north to south: Bellevue Street, Northam Street and Compton Walk, of which only the east part of Compton Walk survives). These streets were demolished in the 1950s in order to create the Charlotte Place roundabout.

Previous investigations (summarised in Garner 2003, 106–109) have located evidence of Iron Age (700 BC–AD 43) activity to the south and east of the site. From this evidence it seems likely that an Iron Age settlement existed about 150m south of the present site, although its precise function and extent remain uncertain. The Middle Saxon (AD 700–850) settlement known as Hamwic lies mainly to the southeast of the site, and



Fig. 1 Site location

evidence of Saxon activity has been recovered from the surrounding area, but it is not certain whether this reflects extra-mural settlement or an extension of the town beyond its previously known limits (for details of previous investigations, see Morton, 1992, 4–15). The old Co-Op site (directly east of Charlotte Place) has been the subject of several investigations over the past 20 years (Garner 2003, 107–109). These investigations found evidence of a north-south hollow-way and metalled road, interpreted as part of a Saxon street corresponding to the modern St Mary's Road and St Mary Street. Relatively few Middle Saxon features were found and the number of finds in them was low, but they included a preserved wooden cask from a well and evidence of iron-working and textile production, as well as domestic refuse and a few fragments of human bone. Two Prehistoric features and two layers were also identified, and late Prehistoric pottery and worked flints, mostly Bronze Age or Iron Age, were recovered (Garner 2003, 109–111).

The first investigation of Charlotte Place was SOU 96, a non-archaeological observation during the construction of the car park, with negative results. An evaluation of the car park by Southampton Archaeology in 1999 (SOU 965) comprised four trenches, each about 50 m² in area. It found a scatter of prehistoric material and four Middle Saxon pits in trench 1 (in the south-east of the car park) containing small amounts of pottery, daub, animal bone, glass and a copper alloy suspension loop of a type well-known from Hamwic (c.f. Hinton 1996, 11–13), and recovered a sherd of Middle Saxon pottery from a 19th century feature in trench 3, in the south centre of the site. Trenches 2 and 4 (north-east and north central) produced negative results (Garner 2003, 109).

Geology and topography

The site comprised a car park in the middle of a roundabout (Fig. 1) at SU 42211252 (centre of site), and the geology is River Terrace Deposit No. 3 overlying the Wittering Formation of the Bracklesham Group (British Geological Survey 1987). The site sloped down from north to south and (less so) from east to west. The

highest point recorded at the original ground level was 14.08m OD (on tarmac at the north end of trench 1) and the lowest was 11.67m OD (on kerb at the southeast corner of trench 3). There would appear to have been considerable alteration of the natural slope over the last two centuries.

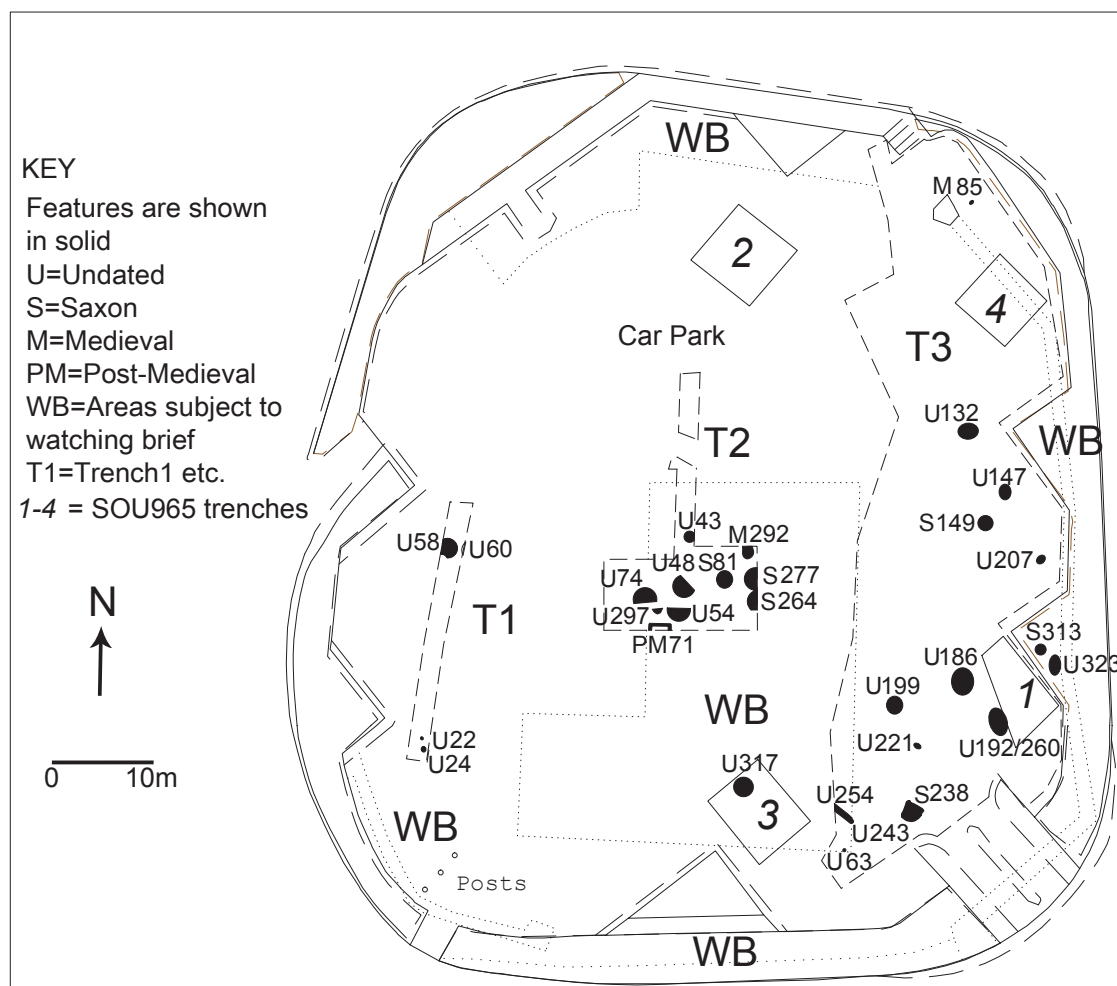
RESULTS (Fig. 2)

Prehistoric

Prehistoric evidence was confined to one worked flint, a humpbacked scraper, recovered from Saxon feature 238 in trench 3 and a (possibly Iron Age) baked clay loomweight from Saxon pit 81 in trench 2, although the latter object was severely damaged and could not be identified with certainty. However, some of the twelve pits and eight smaller features that could not be dated may be Iron Age. Unlike the St Mary's sites described by Garner (2003), no Roman material was recovered from Charlotte Place.

Saxon

Six demonstrably Middle Saxon features were recorded on the site. Three were located together in the south-east part of trench 2: pit 81 had steeply sloping sides and a rounded base and contained three fills (82, 83 and 84), which produced pottery, quern fragments, a loomweight, animal bone (including one worked piece) and burnt daub. Pit 264 was less certainly identified – its four fills (265, 274, 275 and 276) contained few finds, notably another loomweight, but also a medieval tile and a modern brick. These may have entered the pit via a 19th century well and a modern drain trench that cut it, as 264 was earlier than pit 277 (fills 278, 279, 280 and 291), which contained Middle Saxon pottery and a glass bead. Only two Saxon features were recorded in trench 3: pit 149, in the central part, was a steep-sided pit with a flat base, and its four fills (150, 204, 205 and 206) contained Middle Saxon pottery, burnt daub and animal bone. Near the south end of trench 3 was feature 238, a pit (or possibly a failed attempt at a



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Fig. 2 Site plan

well). Its fills (239, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 295 and 296) contained Middle Saxon pottery, and the lower fills (286, 295 and 296) were waterlogged and contained preserved wood and vegetable matter. The only identifiably worked pieces of wood were an oak stake (in four pieces), which appeared to have been driven into 238 after it had filled, as it did not pierce the base of the pit, and a piece of unidentified wood that had been split longitudinally and roughly tapered at both ends. The

rest were twigs, roots and unworked fragments, some of beech, but mostly unidentified. The environmental samples identified hedgerow and wetland plants, but no cereals or other evidence of agriculture. The watching brief identified one more Middle Saxon feature (313), just outside the east limit of trench 3: it had been truncated, but still contained two fills (314 and 316). Fill 316 was barren, but 314 contained a fragment of Niedermendig lava (possibly from a quern, but without surviving

worked surfaces), burnt daub, animal bone, two iron fragments and seven sherds of Middle Saxon pottery, including examples from all three of the Fabric Groups that were recovered from the site.

Medieval

Pit 292 in trench 2 contained burnt daub and a possibly medieval roof tile, and the small feature 85 (at the north end of trench 3) contained three fragments of a green-glazed medieval roof tile. Four sherds from the same, much abraded, medieval pot were recovered from trench 2, but they were unstratified.

Post-Medieval and Modern

Part of a square or rectangular stone-lined pit or soakaway (feature 71) was exposed in the south edge of trench 2. The backfill of this feature was clearly 19th century in date, but the sides were lined with stone (mainly limestone), including some architectural fragments, probably demolition material.

Most of the features recorded at Charlotte Place were modern, and many related to the former streets that had been demolished to make way for the roundabout: most of the ten brick-lined wells seem to align with the backyards of the properties in Compton Walk and Northam Street. Comparison with the 1846 Royal Engineers' map shows that most of the wells must have been housed in outbuildings, as none are marked in the gardens, despite the level of detail shown (including trees and flower beds). A number of rectilinear brick features also located in the backyards may have been latrines, and a brick-built culvert running east-west across trench 3 and part of the watching brief area, with spurs projecting to the south, is almost certainly drainage laid along Northam Street. A number of features in the central part of trench 3 are probably the result of 19th and 20th century horticulture. Apart from the drain mentioned above, no other evidence of the 19th century streets themselves or of the houses that lined them was found, so truncation of the centre of the site may have been more severe than at either end.

Undated

Two undated pits (58 and 60) and two smaller features (22 and 24) were found in trench 1. Three more pits (48, 54 and 74) were clustered together close to the Middle Saxon features in trench 2, together with one possible post-hole (297) – another pit (43) lay about 4m to the north of these. In trench 3 there were five shallow pits (132, 147, 207, 199 and 221), three deeper pits (186, 192/260 and 229), a posthole (63) and two other shallow or truncated features (243 and 254) that contained either no inclusions, or charcoal and fragmented animal bone only. All of these features lay in the south half of trench 3, and most near the south end. The watching brief recorded three more undated features, two containing charcoal, burnt clay and burnt flint (317 and 323) and one without any inclusions (329) that was probably a natural feature. Feature 317 showed evidence of modern disturbance, but was later found to lie within SOU 965 trench 3, so this is not unexpected.

DISCUSSION

Saxon evidence

The Saxon evidence comprised six pits, of which three were clustered together in trench 2, two were widely separated in trench 3 and the sixth (from the watching brief) lay just outside the east edge of trench 3, and between the latter two. Four pits were found in the earlier evaluation. There was no sign of the putative boundary ditch suggested by evidence from Six Dials and the Mosque site to the south, or of the hollow-way identified on the Old Co-Op site. Compared to the Old Co-Op site, modern disturbance was generally shallower, allowing the survival of pits and truncated postholes, so ditches are likely to have survived if they had been present.

The number of Saxon features was low, as was their density, about 0.8 per 100 m² (counting only positively dated features) or 3 per 100m² (including undated features). This compares with 3 per 100 m² at the Old Co-Op to the east and 11 per 100 m² at Six Dials to the south.

It appears that the density at Charlotte Place decreases to the north and west, away from the street found on SOU 379, which could be expected, although the greatest concentration was in trench 2, in the centre of the site; trench 1 (to the west) contained only two pits and two smaller features, all undated. Ninety-nine sherds of Middle Saxon pottery were recovered, and all were from Fabric Groups III, IV and VI, a smaller number and range of types than at the old Co-Op site. None of the pottery fell into Fabric Group I, considered to be the earliest fabric in Hamwic, and there were no imported wares.

The low density of features, the absence of ditches or road surfaces and the environmental evidence of overgrown, possibly waste land, supports Garner's conclusion that the site lay on the outskirts of, or possibly even outside, the settlement proper, and that the town's boundary was not clearly defined in this area. Indeed, this site adds to the picture of Hamwic as a place of relatively sharp contrasts, encompassing both densely occupied areas such as Six Dials, and apparently peripheral areas like Charlotte Place, located within 250m of each other.

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