

March 2019:

Chapel Riverside: the edge of *Hamwic*, Holy Trinity Chapel and a tide mill

This month's lecture on 12th March at St Joseph's was a long-awaited talk from Phil Andrews about the Chapel Riverside site in Southampton, aka the old Town Depot at Endle Street, which closed in 2016. Phil has had some forty years of experience in Southampton's archaeology, so this talk attracted an audience of nearly sixty people, including many guests.

The site is located north of Itchen Bridge on the west bank of the river, a multi-period site excavated early in 2017 by Wessex Archaeology. Much of the area is reclaimed land and restrictions were caused by the need to avoid high-voltage cables and water pipes. Earlier evaluations had indicated some Mesolithic and Bronze Age activity and a few Roman potsherds; while evidence of Mid-Saxon pits and structural remains appear to confirm that the settlement of Hamwic 'faded out' on its south-eastern edge in the 9th century, in the vicinity of the River Itchen and the adjoining marsh.

A Late-Saxon ditched enclosure was possibly related to an early group of burials (left *in situ*), hinting at the presence of a late Saxon wooden church preceding the medieval remains of Holy Trinity Chapel. South of this cemetery a trackway led to the ferry crossing at Cross House, with the River Itchen immediately to the east and fields to the west.

The Cross House showing former track to River Itchen ferry crossing. Blue hoarding indicates southern limit of site. S Hanna



The identification of the chapel was a significant outcome of the excavation, and the surviving stone walls of this small building have been preserved *in situ*. Excavation has enabled a good understanding of the layout and development of the Holy Trinity Chapel and its associated cemetery, from the early 13th century to the Dissolution. There is evidence that some priests lived on-site and three may have been buried within the chancel. The cemetery extended to the former water's edge, and about 120 medieval graves were excavated which suggests a burial rate of one every three years across three centuries or so. The remains are well-preserved and range from infants to older people, reflecting a 'normal' population. By the mid-16th century the chapel was owned by the town of Southampton and there are records of an annual 'Holy Trinity Fair', but no archaeological evidence of the event survives.

Later features were found cutting through the cemetery where many graves had been disturbed and truncated: these included a medieval cess pit containing Saintongeware jugs, a lime-kiln, and a later causeway between two 13/14th century millponds. No evidence of any 12/13th century mill was found (although shown on documents) but substantial remains of the later tide mill were excavated within footprint of Holy Trinity Chapel, where the wheel pit contained the massive wooden axle of the mill wheel. The mill, a 17th century miller's house and other buildings were

destroyed after 1941 by German bombs; photographs taken by OGS Crawford (held in Southampton City archives) documented many of them before destruction.

In the late 19th century the area was covered by terraced housing for workers in local industries such as shipbuilding, but these were demolished during 20th century slum clearances, leaving only the footings of post-medieval buildings. The site is now being developed with riverside apartments so there is little remaining to be seen on the ground. A Wessex Archaeology monograph is due to be published in 2020, which will provide further insights into these discoveries.

Following the talk an interesting discussion arose among the audience, concerning local traditions associated with the Holy Trinity Chapel. It is said that the chapel had been a medieval pilgrimage site and it was visited by King Henry VIII and his first Queen, Katharine of Aragon. Other audience members, including archaeologists formerly working with Southampton City Archaeological Unit pointed out that these stories could not be confirmed by any archaeological or documentary evidence.

This was a brilliant evening, and we are grateful to Wessex Archaeology and Phil Andrews for sharing the story with our members.

Sarah Hanna