

A REPORT ON THE WORK OF SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT by Dr Andy Russel, 9th May 2023 at the AGM of Southampton Archaeology Society.

Andy reported that although the Unit staff have been incredibly busy, there has not been much actual archaeology. Excavations within the city boundary have mainly involved extensions to school and sports facilities. Planning applications are viewed by the Archaeology Officer to decide whether the site would require either a watching brief or full excavation, which then becomes part of the planning conditions. Sites may be of interest due to finds being excavated in the past, or an area known to have been settled, or within the old city walls.

Oasis Academy, Test Valley: This site was formerly Millbrook Secondary School, and several historic environments were known to surround the site. These were mainly Iron Age, such as the probable site of a village located between Green Lane towards the primary school to the north. In the past Matt Garner carried out a school project where test pits brought up Iron Age material, late Iron Age (100BC) to the Roman conquest, but no Roman items were found. These settlements reorganised the landscape: hearths, ditches and possibly houses were uncovered. Excavation was undertaken for a temporary classroom, and a “multi-use games area” (MUGA), requiring half a metre of soil being dug out to accommodate a waterproof surface.

A medical facility for extra services to the children was being added at the school next door, and excavations revealed a ditch, some evidence of hearths together with carbonated charcoal and Iron Age and Saxon pottery sherds. On old maps “Winmaston” (Wimpson) was shown as Nursling, but is now in Maybush. There was no evidence of crops/food planting, so the area was probably pasture despite being a very wet area. Soil samples are being investigated and the Unit staff will return to site in June, when drainage and manholes are to be installed.

Upper Shirley High (formerly Belle Moor) School: Three tennis courts are being replaced, and this site is near to Southampton Common which has lots of interesting archaeology. The site was stripped and it is known that between 1910 to 1940s there was a nursery in that area (clay pipes found). The geology reveals gravel terraces (Shirley is built on gravel terrace ?4), and over the years many hand axes have been found around this area. A deposit of brickearth appears above the gravel, with ‘flame-like convolutions’, which arose in the late Ice Age when the flow of rivers slowed down and silt was deposited, often producing worked flints.

Weston Point: The area of Weston Shore is one of our most rapidly eroding coastlines, and several projects have been undertaken by the Unit over the years. Waves in that area have become bigger and winds stronger so Weston is gradually disappearing. In the 19th century local landowner, Chamberlain, built a sea defence wall using stone from Netley Abbey which was owned by him, and at that time in ruins. The Floating Bridge across the Itchen came into being in 1840, making it easier for Southampton residents and visitors to visit Netley Abbey and the site was cleaned up and repaired for events, turning it into the Abbey we see today. During the current bolstering of the sea defences at Weston, late medieval floor tile was found in the older defences together with fragments of Purbeck stone. Recently SCC Archaeology Unit investigated the site before Swedish Rock (Rockarmour) was installed to reinforce the sea defences.

Mayflower Park: Investigations are underway in the park in preparation for development, and the Unit carried out research and archaeological excavation. A drilling rig was used to investigate peat deposits, such as those found nearby at West Quay, Toys R Us and Marchwood sites, which could supply data to indicate changing sea levels. No peat was revealed, but concrete at the bottom of the boreholes was thought to be part of a D-Day era hard, and railway tracks were located which had been used for loading rolling stock directly on to WW 2 Landing Ships. LiDAR undertaken of the area shows the American army camp, roadways, tracks and hards, plus the remains of a 100m landing stage which could take 30 Sherman tanks. Similar remains pertaining to D-Day were found in Dieppe and Le Havre (France). Below these a World War 1 jetty was found, built to accommodate a roll-on-roll-off ferry.

Southampton Walls:

- **Medieval Tudor Hall (now Westgate Hall):** During the last nine months the Unit has been undertaking a huge project to restore the City walls and monuments, with £8m allocated to carry out remedial repairs to the walls. Beneath Westgate Hall it was found that salt previously stored in the hall has leached through the wall and is consequently dissolving the stone. Details have been sent to the architect and a schedule is to be drawn up for repairs. Contractors have been appointed to undertake these works.
- **North Walls near Bargate:** Several test trenches revealed that the medieval rampart is still present, so work is needed to ensure any landscaping does not affect it. This stretch of wall runs from the Bargate to Polymond Tower, and on to East Street.

Holyrood Church: Structural repairs are to take place to the church, and the spiral staircase in the tower was recorded in detail (photographing each step).

Inside of the Bargate: A 3D laser scan was undertaken to determine the repair work needed. The roof definitely needs repair; and it is hoped the Bargate will be open for Heritage Open Days in September 2023!

Albion Place: This is the site of the proposed new Transport Hub, and is currently a car park. The Unit recently put in exploratory trenches and boreholes, locating the ditch around Southampton Castle. Research showed that in 1959 a trench was dug by amateur archaeologists, 20m long and 6m deep, which was close shored with timbering. Unfortunately, once a trench that deep and narrow has been dug, it is not possible to draw a good section.

Outside the City: The Unit has undertaken work over several years at **Twyford**, Hampshire, where several clients requested surveys in Park Lane. It is known that in 1902, a Mr Nicholls of Southampton put up for sale a dilapidated Roman villa with a corrugated iron shed built above it. This was eventually sold and a house named 'Roman Villa' was built on the site, which the current owner now wants to extend. Any archaeology is very deep down, but tesserae were found and a chimney supported by Roman tiles (pilae, as used in hypercaust systems), and flint walls with bonding courses were found in the cellar.

Isle of Wight: Several projects have been undertaken on the Island. At **Arreton** the Unit checked a site where it was thought a medieval village could have been located along the road. Re-deposited Roman and medieval pottery was found in back-fill. Further south at **Hale Common**, the largest archaeological excavation on the Island has been taking place over the last four years, on a 22-acre site. The site was unfortunately ploughed for many years, but during excavations Bronze age burials were found, as well as a possible Roman linear village. Here a Roman burial was uncovered, including a small box containing six Roman coins, three of which bore the stamp of female emperors. Investigations are ongoing and the results are awaited. It is known there was a Roman rural settlement at Hale Common (a medieval name) and some of the ditches show medieval finds. There is one further field left to excavate.

Mandy Kesby