

## SAS 2022 Study Day talks summary

The SAS annual Study Day was held on 18th June 2022: **Bargate to Civic Centre**, with talks on these and some of Southampton's lesser known historic buildings. The programme was devised by Matt Garner, to tie-in with Southampton's bid to become City of Culture 2025 (SO25). Sadly we heard at the end of May that Bradford is to be the City of Culture in 2025, but this didn't dampen the enthusiasm of the speakers for their chosen buildings; nor put off the audience of over fifty, members and non-members, some of whom have joined SAS. We plan to produce a more extended summary, which will be posted on our website as soon as possible (please see [www.southamptonarchaeology.uk](http://www.southamptonarchaeology.uk)).

Andy Russel opened the proceedings with a talk on the **Bargate** and its complex history: built in c1180 to guard the main entrance to the Town, the building went through five phases of development which are a puzzle to decipher. At various times it has incorporated guardrooms for defending the Town, a Guildhall, Courtroom and prison, Police Station, Fire Station, Museum and Art Gallery. The main arch was scarred by trams passing through it, and demolition was threatened before the intervention of Hampshire Field Club (HFC) led to a national campaign to save the building. Eventually the adjacent Walls were demolished to allow traffic to bypass the Bargate, and it was scheduled as an ancient monument in 1936.

Jo Bailey gave the next talk about the **Weigh House** in French Street, Southampton, an important medieval building which suffered severe damage from bombing in WW2. The Weigh House dates from the 13th century and was the site of the Tron, a weighing beam and weights used for assessing customs charges on goods, especially wool, before export from the port. This building was also threatened by demolition in the 20th century, before its importance was recognised by a local architect and member of HFC, with its medieval oak roof and ancient windows (1370s). It was not scheduled until 1951 (after loss of the roof through fire). Recent laser scanning together with work to conserve and restore the building has revealed new information on its history and archaeology.

The talk about **Laser Scanning Southampton's Medieval Heritage** was presented by Matt Garner, as the original speaker Kris Strutt was recovering from Covid (and his colleague Felix Pedrotti was unable to attend). The technique uses photography with high resolution 'point clouds' to create a digital model of the site, revealing details which may be difficult to spot by eye. In a collaboration between Southampton Archaeology Unit and the University of Southampton, they scanned the interior and exterior of the Weigh House and also north and south faces of the Bargate, which will be used by the architect to pinpoint areas for repair. Buildings scanned include the West Gate and Westgate Hall (with adjacent Walls); the Castle Bailey and Castle Gate, Castle Vault and Lankester's Vault. Other projects involved the University's Avenue Campus, showing WW1 training trenches; Southampton's Central and Hoglands Parks and St Michael's Square in the Old Town. This is a valuable new technological tool for interpreting archaeology.

Cheryl Butler followed with a comprehensive tour of the architecture of **Bugle Street**, one of Southampton's oldest streets. South of the Castle Bailey walls are several phases of social housing, from 1902 (slum clearance of dilapidated medieval burgage plots); the 1950s in locally produced yellow brick; 1963's high rise Castle Towers, the 'design for modern living' of that era; to a late 20th century award-winning development with overhangs and a central courtyard. Three public houses illustrate different styles: the 'Brewer's Tudor' of the *Juniper Berry*, and the Edwardian *Titanic* in red brick where the design references several building periods; contrasting with the *Duke of Wellington* further down the street, a 15th century tenement with original oak frame, incorporating an adjacent cottage, and restored

after WW2 bombing. Next door is a 20th century block of flats, post-war 'infilling' on the original plot (with medieval vaults surviving beneath). St Michael's Church, 1070, the oldest building within the Walls has been enlarged from the original cruciform building with a raised roof and spire added; while nearby St Joseph's RC Church, founded 1843, was partly designed by August Pugin in Gothic Revival style. Opposite St Michael's is Tudor House, a medieval tenement and now Museum with 'fake' frontage but featuring Tudor brickwork, overhangs and eaves: houses down both sides of the street stand on medieval plots, with interiors preserving original features, but with Georgian frontages and sash windows. The medieval tenement of West Hall became a school in Georgian times (later KES VI Grammar School) and in the 20th century converted to the city's Registry Office. The Italianate former Royal Yacht Club stands at the end of Bugle Street, opposite the Wool House, a Norman stone house with open hall and upper living area - now used as a brewery and restaurant.

Frank Green then talked about **Southampton's Victorian Churches**, and he began with a list of a dozen 19th century churches across the city, of several denominations, which are still in use. The dominant style of these is Gothic and many were built by leading architects of the day, while a few are in revived Romanesque style. The talk concentrated on St Denys parish church in Portswood, built between 1866 and 1890, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott at the behest of the Pearce family, who were major contributors. Many features were made by prominent craftsmen, including floor tiles in opus sectile mosaic and encaustic tiles similar to designs in Westminster Abbey and St David's Cathedral in Wales; silver chalice and patten in Gothic style; the organ was brought from Winchester where it had been installed in St Maurice and then St Thomas Church. Major repairs to the church of St Denys were carried out in 2015, funded by HLF when the bells were rehung on steel supports, and many windows and memorials repaired. The church stands close to medieval remains of St Denys Priory and a few remnants of stonework survived in local gardens, which are located in the church, such as a stone sarcophagus and carved stones, and a panel of medieval floor tiles.

Andy Skinner talked about **The Secrets of the Civic Centre**, first proposed 1913 but WW1 intervened, then delayed by the need for housing the increasing population of the Borough. A competition was won by architect E Berry Webber: the first stone laid on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1930 by the Duke of York (later King George VI). It is often referred to as Art Deco, but the style was then known as Free Classical, with reference to buildings of earlier ages, eg stone window embrasures echoing beams of ancient Greek buildings; the classical columns of the Guildhall façade; North African style of Art Gallery window. The Clock Tower was a late addition, above the Law Courts on the west side (now SeaCity Museum). Some events in the history of the Civic Centre: 1940 the Guildhall accommodated 1000 Free French troops rescued from Dunkirk; Nov 1940 a 500lb bomb destroyed the Art Gallery entrance and killed 16 schoolgirls and teacher in an air raid shelter beneath; 1942 American forces were based in Southampton. A 'cold war bunker' was found in the basement (not marked on plans). In 2020 the Guildhall hosted a Food Bank during the first pandemic lockdown: the Civic Centre remains at the heart of life in Southampton.

Many thanks to Matt Garner for organising this successful study day, and to the speakers for their varied and inspiring talks. We are most grateful to Southampton Cultural Services for allowing us the use of the Art Gallery Lecture Theatre at a very favourable price, and to the SAS committee for assistance with bookings, displays, programme, and helping on the day.

Sarah Hanna