

Site name: Tower Ramparts School 1979/1981

Site ref: IAS 0802 HER ref: IPS 732 CIMS Accession No: IPSMG:R.2009.48
NGR: TM16324472 Extent: 377 sq m

Circumstances of excavation

The Tower Ramparts Shopping Centre was a major development between Tavern Street, to the south, and Tower Ramparts, to the north, requiring the demolition of property fronting Tavern Street and the Tower Ramparts School behind.

Site constraints

The developer agreed to limited excavation by the Suffolk Archaeological Unit in 1979/1981 provided that it avoided the Tavern Street frontage, did not delay development and was at no cost. In view of the limited funds available, sample excavation only was possible (350 square metres of a site in excess of 3500 square metres). The research design was to trench across the line of the town defences, south of Tower Ramparts, and to sample the school playground with a series of square trenches to maximise understanding of any structures. The trench, cut on the Tower Ramparts frontage, was abandoned and backfilled after revealing an excessive depth of post-medieval disturbance. Four trenches (*0001*, *0050*, *0180*, *0217*) were then excavated within the area formerly covered by the school playground.

Funding bodies

Suffolk County Council, DoE Ancient Monuments Branch and the MSC Youth Opportunities Programme.

Stratigraphic sequence (by period)

The trenches were found to be heavily disturbed, in places, by footings, cellars and World War II air-raid shelters which involved adjustment of the proposed trench locations on site. Trench *0001* was bisected by the cross-passage of an air-raid shelter, and air-raid shelter walls formed all four edges of trench *0050*, the north and south edges of trench *0180*, and the north edge of trench *0217*.

Middle Saxon: c.700-850 (MS)

Structures

Two slots were found, with one (*0073*) in trench *0050* and one (*0151*) in trench *0217*. In both cases there were postholes adjacent implying buildings but with no obvious plans. The north-south slot *0073* has a row of postholes immediately adjacent and to its west (*0065*, *0066*, *0067*, *0068*, *0070*, *0071*, *0072*, *0079*), and two immediately east (*0081*, *0099*), two of which (*0066*, *0079*) had one sherd of Ipswich ware in their fills, but the others had no pottery.

Slot *0151* has undated post holes (*0147-0150*) immediately to its east.

Pits

Five pits were recorded, with two in trench *0001* (*0007*, *0022*), and three in trench *0180* (*0182*, *0190*, *0203*). Pit *0007* contained a Coenwulf of Mercia penny (*0003/0802N*) deposited before c.840, which is confirmation that Thetford ware was not introduced until the middle of the ninth century.

Pit 0190 contained 126 sherds of Ipswich ware, 20 Thetford ware, 1 St. Neot's ware, 1 Early Medieval coarse ware, 1 Ipswich Glazed ware and 3 Frankish Black ware. It is likely that it is Middle Saxon and that all the later pottery derives from the EMED pit (0206) which cuts it but 0206 was dated EMED on the basis of one EMED sherd and otherwise would have been dated MLS. It is equally likely, therefore, that all the later material in 0190 is a result of mislabelling of finds.

Early Late Saxon: c.850-900 (ELS)

Structures

Two certain and two possible slots of ELS date were recorded which represent either fences or the sides of buildings.

In trench 0050, slot 0058 was east-west. An undated north-south slot (0098) could form the east side of the same building. Unfortunately, a complex of pits (0076, 0086, 0094) had destroyed the relationship between them. Slot 0058 cuts an earlier ELS pit (0052), while slot 0098 is cut by ELS pit 0086. A large posthole, or short slot (0069), 1.8m south of slot 0058, was also ELS and may well be part of the same structure.

Slot 0183, in trench 0180, was east-west and terminated in an undated posthole (0191) at its eastern end. Postholes on either side of the slot may be related and part of the same building. Postholes 0186, 0188, 0194, 0197, 0199, 0200, 0205, 0209 and 0215, to the south, were undated apart from 0197 and 0199 which were ELS on the basis of pottery content, and 0201 and 0208 to the north were also undated. Posthole 0195, also to the north of the slot was probably EMED in date..

The east-west slot (0005) in trench 0001 is either ELS on pottery evidence but could be MLS on stratigraphic grounds (see below).

Pits

There were eight pits of this period: one (0019) in trench 0001, one (0152) in trench 0217, and six (0052, 0082, 0086, 0094, 0105, 0114) in trench 0050.

The large circular pits in trench 0050 (0052, 0082, 0105) may belong to an earlier phase of activity than the smaller square or rectangular pits (0086, 0094, 0114), based on limited stratigraphic evidence.

Feature 0158 in trench 0217 is also ELS but it is uncertain whether it was the remnant of a ditch or pit.

Middle Late Saxon: c.900-1000 (MLS)

Pits

Seven pits belong certainly to this period: one (0017) in trench 0001, one (0184) in trench 0180, and five (0054, 0076, 0087, 0097, 0115) in trench 0050, although the heavily truncated 0097 could have been a ditch remnant. Pit 0206, in trench 0180, could also be MLS in date if the single sherd of EMED pottery is intrusive.

Ditches

Only one ditch (0010), in trench 1, was of MLS date. It was 1.8m wide and shallow (0.8m deep).

Slot 0005, also in trench 0001, and in line with ditch 0010, could also belong to this period and be an earlier remnant of the same boundary line.

Early Medieval: c.1000-1200 (EMED)

Ditches

There were three certain ditches and one possible ditch of this period.

Ditch 0006, running north to south in trench 0001, 3.6m wide and 2.1m deep, was clearly a boundary of some significance. A single silt band, in the base of both ditch 0006 and MLS ditch 0010 might indicate that ditch 0006 was also cut in the MLS period but (unlike ditch 0010) was not finally filled until the end of the 12th or possibly the early 13th century, as its fill included two sherds of LMED glazed pottery (and 2 LMT which must be intrusive).

Traces of a similar north-south ditch (0153), found due north, on the eastern edge of trench 0217, was undoubtedly a continuation of the same ditch. Ditch 0153 was either cut or was cut by two EMED pits (0142, 0157), and the relationship remains uncertain. A second possible north-south ditch (0145) lay just west of 0153.

The remnant of a large east-west ditch (0080), running along the north side of trench 0050, would appear to be another boundary ditch of similar size, probably linking in to ditch 0006 further to the west. Some pin tile, recovered from the filling of the ditch, was probably intrusive.

Pits

Nine pits belong to this period: three in trench 0001 (0012, 0016, 0023), three in trench 0180 (0198, 0206, 0211) and three in trench 0217 (0142, 0157, 0159). Pit 0016, cut into the extreme eastern edge of the infilling of EMED ditch 0006, may be later as the pottery may well have been derived from the earlier ditch.

Late Medieval: c.1200-1450 (LMED)

There were four pits of this period: two (0002, 0020) in trench 0001, one (0144) in trench 0050, and one (0185) in trench 0180.

Pit 0185 was sub-rectangular, 3m wide and over 3m long, with a flat bottom 1.20m deep, reminiscent of an in-filled cellar. It had been cut away by the more obvious LMT cellar (0181) on its south side.

Pit 0144 was linear, over 5m long, 2m wide and 2m deep, and cut by a large LMT pit (0140) on its west side.

Late Medieval Transitional: c.1450-1600 (LMT)

There were four pits and one slot of this period.

Pit 0181, in trench 0180, was a large rectangular cellar, over 2.5 by 3.7m and 1.6m deep. A flint and mortar wall, c. 0.25m thick, marked the northern end of the cellar pit, where it cut LMED feature 0185. There was no evidence for a return to the wall along the eastern edge and the remains of timbering, within the back filled cellar, suggests that this wall may have been timber lined. The full dimensions of the cellar are unknown, as it extended outside of the excavated area. No traces of any floor covering were recorded.

In trench 0217, there was a large pit (0140) and east-west linear slot (0143), which cut across the LMED pit 0144.

In addition there was one large pit (0013), in trench 0001, and one small pit (0057), in trench 0050.

A clay spread (0146) was recorded as extending over pits 0144 (LMED) and 0154 (EMED), but its relationship to pit 0140 is unrecorded either in plan or section. This layer is therefore probably contemporary or later than this feature, but of unknown significance.

Post-Medieval: c.1600-1900 (PMED)

Three pits, a well and a slot date to this period.

Four of the features were in trench *0050*: two pits (*0053*, *0102*), a slot (*0055*), 4.5m long, and a brick-lined well or soak-away (*0064*)

An isolated pit (*0028*) in trench *0001* was devoid of any datable finds, but was full of clinker.

Modern: after 1900 (MOD)

Trench *0001* was bisected by the cross-passage of a World War 2 air-raid shelter, and air-raid shelter walls formed all four edges of trench *0050*, the north and south edges of trench *0180*, and the north edge of trench *0217*.

Finds noted

A MS/LS plain copper-alloy strap end from LMT pit *0013* (*0004/0802Cu*)

An Anglo-Saxon copper-alloy strip with rivet and ring and dot decoration from MLS pit *0017* (*0005/0802Cu*)

Potential for further research

Unstudied faunal remains.

Keith Wade
2013