

Site Name: Elm Street

Site ref: IAS 3902 HER ref: IPS 053 CIMS Accession No: IPSMG:R.2009.40
NGR: TM15954451 Extent: 485 sq m (of which 44sq m was monitored
contractor trench)

Circumstances of Excavation

The area to be redeveloped was covered with buildings, owned by Ipswich Borough Council, which were to be demolished to make way for a new Magistrates' Court for Suffolk County Council.

The site straddled the known western course of the town defences, providing an opportunity to examine the sequence of construction and compare it with that recorded on the eastern side of the town at Shirehall Yard in 1959.

Site Constraints

The site owners were not prepared to demolish the buildings until immediately prior to the start of development and, consequently, excavation had to be restricted to the open spaces between the buildings.

Following the excavation of trial trench *0014*, an area (*0464*) and three trenches (*0296*, *0319*, *0323*) were opened between December 1974 and February 1975. The buildings were then cleared in May 1975 and permission was given to excavate a further area (*0466*). Recording of contractor's trenches took place in the summer of 1975.

In all areas topsoil was removed by mechanical excavator and the exposed features excavated by hand.

Funding bodies

The excavations were carried out by the Suffolk Archaeological Unit and funded by the DoE Ancient Monuments Branch and Suffolk County Council.

Stratigraphic Sequence (by period)

The earliest periods of activity (Belgic/Romano-British and Middle Saxon) were associated with very little dating evidence making it difficult to separate features from each period. At least two features, with 1st century pottery only, are of Early Middle Saxon/Middle Saxon date (*0469*, *0486*).

Romano-British: 1st-2nd Century AD (ROM)

The total of 52 sherds of 1st century pottery recovered from the site was all from the northern trenches (*0296*, *0464* and *0466*) with a concentration from *0466* (19 sherds). 28 of the sherds were certainly residual in later contexts leaving six features which are likely to date to this period on ceramic evidence (*0064*, *0316*, *0475*, *0485*, *0494* and *0498*), and further features within area *0466* are likely to be of this date by association and/or stratigraphy.

Ditch *0064*, running NNE/SSW in area *0464*, was 1.5m wide and 0.5m deep, with a U-shaped profile.

Structure *0509*, in area *0466*, was orientated NNE/SSW and 3m wide by over 6.5m

long (the north end lay outside of the excavation). The east and west walls were slots (0470, 0474) and the south end consisted of two post holes (0476, 0479). One post position (0489) was recorded in the eastern slot (0470).

In area 0466, five small pits appear to date to this period (0475, 0485, 0494, 0498, 0499) and nine post holes (0471, 0472, 0481/0482, 0491, 0492, 0467, 0468, 0478, 0480), with a further pit (0316) in trench 0296.

Early Middle Saxon/Middle Saxon: c.600-750(EMS/MS)

A single grave (0486) was recorded in area 0466. An associated knife and a tanged tool indicates a 7th or early 8th century date (Loader and Scull 2009).

Middle Saxon: c.700-850(MS)

Three ditches and one small pit belong to this period.

The Enclosure

Ditch 0171, which ran north-south in area 0464, had been truncated and only its lower profile survived which was slot-like, with post holes in the base. Ditch 0308 ran north-south in trench 0296 and was 1.4m wide and 0.5m deep with a U-shaped profile.

Ditch 0469 was located in trench 0466, running east-west and terminating in a butt end (unexcavated) just short of the west edge of area 0466. The ditch was V-shaped in profile, 1.1m wide and 0.4m deep, with a further 0.3m deep slot running along its base. It was traced eastward into trench 0464, where only the 30cm deep slot at its base (0015) survived the truncation by scoop 0165. Although, only one RB sherd was associated, it had the same profile as the certainly Middle Saxon ditch 0171 rather than the RB ditch 0064. It also contained a human femur which is most likely to be Anglo-Saxon in view of the dating of human remains from the site.

The only certain evidence for domestic occupation came from the far south of the site in trench 0319. At the east end of the trench, a foundation trench/slot (0419), 20cm wide ran NNE/SSW across the trench, with one recorded post position (0349), and an adjacent posthole (0329) and pit (0327). The slot and postholes had no associated finds and the pit contained one Ipswich ware sherd only.

Apart from the four sherds of Ipswich ware found in the above ditches and pit, a further 58 sherds were found across the whole site in later contexts, indicating that the area was peripheral to the Middle Saxon town. The three ditches (0171, 0308, 0469) appear to form 3 sides of a rectangular enclosure, with 0171 and 0469 representing a substantial wooden palisade, rather than a simple field boundary.

A Middle Saxon/Early Late Saxon Cemetery

It is clear that there was a cemetery on the site or more likely close by in the 8th/9th century (see discussion of human remains from ditch 0465 below). If there had been burials on the site, the extensive truncation caused by Late Saxon and Early Medieval features east of area 0466 would have removed the graves, but residual human bone, of probable 8th-9th century date, was found across the site and especially in MLS ditch 0465.

A C14 date for the sample of bones collected from this ditch (HAR-2781) gave a date of 1240+/- 70 BP which calibrates to AD650-980 (95% confidence) or AD 670-890

(68% confidence).

Since the excavation, a single *in situ* inhumation was disturbed by road works on the north side of Elm Street in 2002, opposite the site (IPS411, Meredith 2003) and this produced a C14 date (GU-10585) of 1150+/-50 BP which calibrates to 810-980 (64% confidence) or 770-1000 (94.2% confidence). This is, therefore, the most likely location for the cemetery.

As the ditch 0465 was most likely cut in the early 10th century, it implies that the cemetery from which the bones derive, and those found north of Elm Street, dates to the 8th -9th century. Whether there was continuous burial after the 7th/early 8th century burial (0486) must remain uncertain until further excavation can be conducted in the area north of Elm Street.

Human skeletal material was also recovered from other later features across the site. Pit 0239, west of ditch 0465 in area 0464, contained a single femur. Trench 0323 produced a fibula and ribs in pit 0351 and trench 0319 produced a scapula (in pit 0328), an ulna (in pit 0340) and a femur (in layer 0380). Of most interest, is a femur from ditch 0469 in area 0466, which is the earliest residual context (Middle Saxon).

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

It is difficult to assign features to this period with any confidence but many of the un-phased features with Thetford Ware only (and no St Neot's Ware) are likely to be ELS as opposed to MLS but with no stratigraphic evidence to support a precise date.

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

Phase 1 (c.900-950)

Ditch 0465

This north-south ditch was approximately 6 metres wide, where the full width survived, and 2 metres deep. Drainage was from north to south. The lower fill was entirely of waterborne material and the upper layers, mixed with loam, indicate deliberate backfill, presumably from an adjacent bank.

In profile the ditch was not a simple V-shape. Where the lip on the eastern (inner) edge survived, a slot with associated post holes (0279-0284), presumably represents a palisade. The western edge had a flattened ledge-like profile which, in the west end of section 0198, had been cut by a group of four postholes (0160, 0161, 0162, 0369). They do not appear to represent a continuous line of posts as only one (0217) was found further north. It is possible that this 'shelf' is not contemporary with the ditch but the remains of a shallower U-shaped ditch which has then been recut with a deeper V-shaped ditch.

The ditch was traced for the full distance of the site from north to south. Its west edge was recorded at the east end of trench 0319 as context 0371, and its full profile was seen (0502) in one of the contractor's foundation trenches (0500), midway between area 0464 and trench 0319.

The presence of human bones in ditch 0465 was recognized during excavation and a sample area examined in detail, with the position of each bone plotted three-

dimensionally. This appeared to show that some of the bones encountered were related to each other as in a complete skeleton, but disarticulated and a short distance apart. Two complete skulls found were within the "shelf" deposits on the western edge of the ditch, one of which was accompanied by a lower jaw (0118 and 0256). In fact, half the human bones found came from this "shelf" area and the remainder from the layers of ditch adjacent to it. The bones were analysed by Dr David Birkett (Birkett 1978) who concluded that remains 0403-0430, which were all found close together, are probably all from the same skeleton of an adult male. The fact that the majority of one skeleton survived in ditch 0465 (0403-0430) implies that it hadn't moved far after burial. It was most likely to have been originally dug up during the ditch digging and thrown onto the adjacent area as part of the bank. When the ditch was eventually back-filled, using adjacent bank material, the bones remained loosely together. The fact that the bones were found mainly in the western side of the fill of ditch 0465 could indicate the existence of a bank to the west of the ditch as well as the expected one to the east.

Pits

No pits can be assigned to this period.

Phase 2 (c.950-1000)

Building A (0505) (Scanned plan IAS3902_0505)

The filling of ditch 0465 must have been completed by the middle of the 10th century but it is uncertain how soon after building 0505 was cut through its eastern edge. The building was orientated north-south, and measured 3.9m wide and over 6m long (the north end lay under the modern pavement and was not excavated). The cellar was 1.05m deep below the surface of the natural. On its south side, three steps, cut into the natural clay, descended from the surface of the natural to the base of the cellar. The sides of the cellar were vertical below ground level, and traces of staining were observed in the south-east corner, indicating the remains of a timber lining.

Immediately above the floor was a thin layer of grey silt (0293), but no evidence of any floor covering was observed. This was overlain with a layer of fired clay and charcoal, some of which (0435) was found pressed into the natural at the base of the building. This was overlain with a layer mainly comprising unfired clay. The upper filling of layers of sandy loam, indicates a deliberate back-filling.

Slots, of squared section, 0.4-0.5m wide by some 0.15-0.2m deep, below the adjacent floor level, ran alongside the long walls. Some post positions were visible as impressions in the bases of the foundation trenches, indicating close set post or interrupted sill beam construction, rather than a continuous sill. Two short stretches of trench (0155, 0287), discontinuous with those on the long sides, lay either side of the opening at the foot of the steps. Slightly west of the mid-point, and recessed back into the entrance, was a large post hole (0153). Assuming that it held a post of some size, which seems likely, a contemporary relationship with the entrance, at first sight, seems improbable. If of a later date than the entrance, then it might be expected that the filling of the main cellar would differ from that of the steps with the hollow either being deliberately backfilled or left to silt up naturally.

No such difference in fill was however encountered. It may best be explained as some non-structural element, possibly part of an elaborate means of securing the entrance.

Fence 0510

A series of post holes (0065, 0067, 0066, 0132, 0091, 0096, 0093, 0094, 0114, 0275), cutting the top of ditch 0465, in area 0464, appears to indicate a fence with a possible entrance.

Fence 0511

A series of post holes (0195, 0196, 0169, 0170, 0197, 0187, 0186, 0229, 0185, 0183), at the north end of area 0464, forms an L-shaped fence around a series of pits including 0176, which is probably a well.

Pits

Five pits (0069, 0176, 0205, 0218, 0230) cut ditch 0465 and are therefore phase 2 and associated with building 0505. Pit 0176 has a corner post recorded (0194) and was most likely a well. As it cuts 0218 and 0230, it represents the latest in the sequence of MLS phase 2 features.

Unphased (c.850-1000)

Ditch 0172

This ditch, running approximately parallel with the larger ditch 0465, some 7.5m further to the west, had been heavily truncated by the 11th-12th century "scoop" (0165), so that only the base survived. Calculations based on the angles of the sides tended to indicate a ditch some 3m wide by 1m deep. Probable evidence for this ditch was found further south (in trench 0014) in the form of slot 0010, which had also been heavily truncated by the same "scoop", and terminated in a butt end. However, if the ditch had become shallower at this point, it would not have survived truncation and it is likely that it originally continued southwards.

The ditch only produced two sherds of Thetford Ware which does not allow it to be allocated to a precise period other than Late Saxon and doesn't allow a satisfactory interpretation. In terms of alignment, it is parallel to both ditch 0465 (MLS phase 1) and building 0505 (MLS phase 2).

If it contemporary with ditch 0465, it implies a double-ditched defence, with the larger ditch (0465), with its palisade and bank on the town side and a second bank on the west side flanked by the smaller ditch 0172. This might be supported by the human remains in the western fill of ditch 0465 which implied a second bank to the west.

If ditch 0172 is contemporary with building 0505, then it is likely to be the western boundary of its tenement plot. The fact that there are no pits of this date west of the ditch would support this interpretation.

Pits

There were 9 pits in area 0464 (0017, 0033, 0043, 0070, 0071, 0174, 0213, 0223, 0239), one pit in trench 0014(0013), two in trench 0296(0311, 0320) and two in trench 0319 (0328, 0340). They contained Thetford Ware only but had no stratigraphic relationship to other Late Saxon features leaving their phase in doubt.

Early Medieval: c.1000-1200 (EMED)

The "Scoop" (0165)

In the western extension trench of area 0464 was a linear "scoop", 14m wide and up to 1m deep, which removed the upper parts of Late Saxon pits 0174, 0213 and 0239. The same feature was encountered further south in trench 0319, where it was numbered 0342. It was not deep enough to represent a ditch and is interpreted as a borrow 'pit' providing additional soil for the medieval town bank to the west. It compares with the system of adjoining borrow pits found on the School Street excavation (IAS4801 1132), adjacent to the eastern defences.

Pits

Only four pits, 0008 (in trench 0014) and 0068, 0084, 0124 (in area 0464), and all lying to the east of the "scoop", belonged to this period.

Fence 0513

A line of post holes (0149, 0063, 0175, 0074, 0037, 0031, 0030, 0073), crossing the in-filled steps of building 0505 are assigned to this period on the basis of a single sherd of Early Medieval Ware in post hole 0063.

Post holes 0032 and 0062 on the basis of pottery, and 0200 which cuts building 0505, can also be assigned to this period.

Late Medieval: c.1200-c.1450 (LMED)

A linear depression (0347) apparently cutting the backfilled "scoop" 0342, in trench 0319, and a similar depression (0004) at the eastern end of trench 0014, further to the north, are assumed to indicate further strengthening of the town bank to the west.

Ditch 0503

This ditch must be the medieval town ditch. It was only recorded in the building contractor's foundation trenches for the new building (trench 0504 and possibly in the west end of trench 0296) and was 12m wide and 4m deep.

Pits

Only four pits (0007, 0058, 0260, 0370), all lying to the east of the "scoops", belonged to this period reflecting a fairly low level of activity on what must have been kept as open land between the town defences and the intra-mural street (now Curriers Lane) bordering the east of the site.

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

The corner of two buildings (0038/0039 and 0151) with flint, mortar and tile foundations were located on the main site (0464), surviving where they had either sunk, or been set deeper into earlier pits. A further flint and mortar structure (0002), found at the eastern end of trench 0014, and probably of similar date, was either a well or another corner of a building. A well (0077), to the south of these building remains, in area 0464, was also finally filled during this period and a pit (0029) contemporary with building 0038.

These remains appear to be the vestigial traces of a large building shown as occupying the site on Ogilby's map of Ipswich (1674).

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

This upper layers of the medieval town ditch (0503) contained early 17th century pottery and brick, dating its final filling. Only five pits belonged to this period (0023, well 0105, 0246, 0335, 0351) containing little by way of dating material.

The main area (0464) had been covered with buildings up until their demolition in the 1950s. Foundations for these were shallow and were removed by machine, apart from a cellar (0024) in the south-east corner of the site. A coin (0001/3902N) dated 1825, found in the foundations of the front wall of the terraced houses which had abutted Elm Street indicated a date in the second quarter of the 19th century for their construction.

There was little modern disturbance associated with the 20th century housing on the site apart from a line of large holes holding concrete posts in trench 0296 (0317, 0345) and a pipe trench running across area 0466 (0477).

Finds

No faunal remains or environmental evidence was analysed from this site.

Only one early coin (0002/3902N), a penny of Edward the Confessor, was found residual in a later context (0056).

The small amount of non-ferrous metalwork was LMED/LMT.

Scope for further Research

Low.

References

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| Meredith, J, 2003 | <i>Archaeological Monitoring, Road widening Elm Street, Ipswich, (SCCAS Report No.2002/104)</i> |
| Loader, T and Scull, C, 2009 | 'Appendix One. Early Medieval Burials from Elm Street and Foundation Street, Ipswich', in Scull 2009, 321-2. |

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