

Site name: Turret Lane

Site ref: IAS 4302 HER ref: IPS 384 CIMS Accession No: IPSMG:R.2009.44

NGR TM16374431 Extent: 48 sq m

Circumstances of excavation

Following the demolition of Turret Lane School, Suffolk County Council made the area available for excavation by the Suffolk Archaeological Unit in March/April 1978.

Site Constraints

As the site was not immediately threatened with destruction, and funding was limited, excavation was minimal. Owing to the exceptional depth of post medieval overburden encountered, battered excavation edges were necessary and the top 3.25m was removed by machine and halted on reaching an earlier ground surface of uniform dark greyish-brown loam. The sand and gravel subsoil was found at c. 2.9m OD, some 3.5m below the modern ground surface.

Funding bodies

The excavation was funded by the Department of the Environment (Ancient Monuments Branch) and Suffolk County Council.

Stratigraphic sequence (by period)

A number of features were recorded cutting the earlier ground surface/topsoil layer (*0002, 0006, 0008, 0009, 0010, 0011, 0012, 0028*). This layer, on average 0.5m thick across the site, was then removed by hand, with finds recorded by grid square (*0013, 0015-0025, 0033*).

Below this topsoil layer and over much of the site lay a pinkish-grey loamy sand often grading into hard iron pan lying on top of the natural gravel surface. It had the appearance of a truncated soil profile with evidence of podzolisation (the "A" horizon being removed by occupation). This possible pre-occupation soil was examined by Helen Keeley of the Department of Environment's Ancient Monuments Laboratory confirming the interpretation.

Above the old topsoil there was a marked change to an olive-brown loam layer covered by a very dark greyish-brown loam topsoil. The two, forming nearly 1.5m of build-up, undoubtedly representing imported soil specifically to raise the ground surface.

Middle Saxon: c.700-850 (MS)

Two features (pit *0038* and well *0039*) certainly belonged to this period.

Well *0039*

This contained six fresh Middle Saxon sherds with one abraded Thetford-type ware base. The latter most likely derived from one of the two later pits (*0026* and *0032*), which removed most of the upper well fill.

Part of the wooden lining of the well survived below the water-table, at 1.7mOD, showing that shaft had been circular (60-70cm in diameter) and slightly east of the centre of its pit. The section which survived was part of a hollowed out tree

trunk up to 8cms thick. Owing to the uncertainties of date a sample of this wood was sent for C14 dating and the result was 1230+/-70 BP (720 AD).

Pit 0038 was associated with one Ipswich ware sherd only. Small pit 0083, which was cut by well 0039 contained no pottery but must be assumed to be Middle Saxon or earlier.

Early Late Saxon: c.850-900/920 (ELS)

Pottery Kiln (0082)

Most of the kiln oven had been cut away by LMT pit 0006 and MLS pit 0072). All that survived was part of the stoke pit (0014), the collapsed flue arch (0078), and the start of the oven-pit walls (0082). Pit 0072 contained much of the oven pit walls thrown back in a fragmentary state. The quantity of pottery within the structure and in the pits which cut it (including some wasters) leaves no doubt that it was a pottery kiln producing Ipswich Thetford Ware. None of the *in situ* or dislodged fragments indicated any internal structure such as arches. The kiln surfaces were fired hard grey indicating considerable usage.

In addition, four pits (0044, 0048, 0080, 0081) and two post holes (0043, 0045) are likely to belong to this period, although the dating evidence is poor.

Middle Late Saxon: c.900/920-1000 (MLS)

Four pits (0029, 0032, 0047, 0072) can be assigned to this period. It is possible that pit 0072 represents two pits (the western half being a separate pit, numbered 0063 but, if so, they are both MLS in date.

Early Medieval: c.1000-1200 (EMED)

Six pits (0026, 0031, 0035, 0050, 0066, 0075) certainly belong to this period. In addition, slot 0037 and pit 0041 are also EMED or later as they cut EMED pit 0075 (but have ELS pottery associated).

Water was recorded in the base of pit 0031 at 1.52m OD.

Late Medieval: c.1200-1450 (LMED)

Four pits (0034, 0042, 0076, 0077) belonged to this period. A penny of the 14th century or later was also unstratified from a sondage (0007) into the early topsoil layer.

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

Two pits (0002, 0006) and a slot (0009) belonged to this period. Pit 0002 produced a half penny dated 1344-51, which must be residual.

Pit 0008, and post hole 0012, although associated with ELS pottery, were cut from a high level and are most likely LMT or later.

Post Medieval (PMED)

Two pits certainly belong to this period: 0011 and 0005 (recorded in section only).

Undated (Un)

Pit 0062 had no pottery but was cut by LMED pit 0042 and had an unrecorded relationship to MS pit 0038. The small pit or post hole 0010 had no pottery but was cut by LMT slot 0009 and cut MLS pit 0047.

Discussion

The pre-occupation soil was of the type characteristic of heathland and indicates that the pre-urban Ipswich landscape was similar in nature to the heaths which survive to the north and east of the town.

Middle Saxon occupation was sparse and limited to one pit and a well, and only about 150 Ipswich ware sherds were recovered from the whole site.

Early late Saxon occupation was also sparse but included a pottery kiln (the only Ipswich Thetford ware kiln found to date outside of the known potters' quarter in Cox Lane). The sequence indicates that it was in production early in the Thetford ware production period i.e. later 9th or early 10th century.

Thereafter, small numbers of pits represent the MLS, EMED, LMED and LMT periods

During the LMT period, the site lay at the north end of the precinct of Wolsey's College in the vicinity of the gatehouse for the north entrance (the turret which gave its name to the street). The substantial raising of ground levels on the site is most likely associated either with the construction of the college in the early 16th century or for Mr Sparrow's ornamental garden, which is known to have occupied the site from the 17th to early 19th centuries (Ogilby 1674 and Pennington 1778).

Environmental sampling

Flotation of 5 litres of soil (0070) from MS well 0039, produced five seeds (three cereal and two legume), a nut fragment and seven fish bones (five herring and two eel), all, presumably, derived from the overlying occupation layers (Murphy *et al* 2003).

Potential for further research

Low.

Appendix: Examination of the old topsoil/ground surface

The results of the hand removal of the 0.5m of topsoil, down to the surface of the natural was a time-consuming but useful exercise on which to base further decisions about excavation methodology on Ipswich sites.

The earliest feature that was recognised as cutting the surface of this deposit was a slot (0028) associated with EMED pottery, although LMT wares were incorporated within the hand excavation of two of the quadrants (0016, 0024) and the slot is most likely later in date than the pottery suggests.

Analysis of the pottery by grid square and comparison of this with underlying features shows a direct correlation.

	Ips	MS Import	Thet	STN	EMW	Rhen	LMed	LMT
0013	3		155	3	3			
0015	2		19					
0016	2	1	30	3	1		8	1
0017			26					
0018	5		157	7	3	6		
0019			4		1			
0020	1		20	2	1			
0021	6		334	23				
0022			19	1	1			
0023	2		61	1		4		
0024	2		64	4	4	1		1
0025	3		49			1		
0033								

The largest quantity of Thetford ware was recovered from squares 0013, 0018 and 0021, all in the north-east corner of the site where the MLS pits (0029, 0032, 0047 and 0072) were found, and LMED pot only came from square 0016 above the LMED pits 0076, 0077 and 0042.

The conclusions from this work are that:

1. most of the pits, which were not seen on cleaning the old ground surface, undoubtedly cut through the topsoil layer;
2. the topsoil, which accumulated mainly from the 8th –15th centuries, represented the organic residue formed by a long period of pit digging, which slowly raised the ground surface, as spoil was both dug out and returned to local interventions.
3. detailed examination of these old topsoil layers is poor value unless they contain obvious features, such as building floor levels, observed during careful topsoil stripping by machine. The loss of the upper parts of pits by machining topsoil is inevitable if they cannot be seen on stripping.