

Archaeological Investigations in Ipswich

The town of Ipswich is located in south-east Suffolk, 12 miles inland at the lowest bridging point of the River Gipping, at the point where the tidal channel of the river widens out into the Orwell Estuary. The town is centred at Ordnance Survey grid point TM 1590 4060. Administratively the historic town is within Ipswich Borough, a district council within the county of Suffolk.

The modern town centre of Ipswich lies on the site of its Middle Saxon predecessor. Pottery and artefacts recovered over the past two centuries from within the historic core of the town have been accessed into the collections of the Borough Museum, and their location recorded on a card index. Investigation of the Museum's collections by John Hurst and Stanley West¹ in the late 1950s led not only to the identification of Ipswich ware as Middle Saxon (c. 650 – c. 850 AD) pottery, but also to the conclusion that it was being produced in quantity within the town, and being traded over much of eastern England during that period. Despite this recognition of the town's early foundation, little opportunity was taken to undertake archaeological excavation within the historic core of the town. While a number of developments were monitored by officers of the Borough Museum during the 1960s and early 70s², the only archaeological excavations carried out since Nina Layard's investigations of the late 19th- early 20th centuries³ were by Stanley West, then employed by the Borough Museum.⁴

The recognition during the 1970s of Ipswich as one of only a handful of trading settlements, displaying urban characteristics (Emporia), found to exist in western Europe during this period, elevated the town's archaeological status to one of international importance.

In 1974, the Suffolk Archaeological Unit was created, under the management of the Scole Committee for East Anglian Archaeology. The Unit aimed to provide a countywide rescue archaeological service, and was to create the post of urban archaeologist to monitor development in all the urban centres of Suffolk, although the post-holder would have special reference to Ipswich, which had previously been identified by the Scole Committee as a town under serious threat from a potential development boom.⁵ The incumbent, Keith Wade, was established at the offices of the County Planning Department in Ipswich, and for the first time in the town's history an archaeologist was appointed whose specific brief was to excavate and record, where possible, archaeological sites threatened with destruction from new development proposals.

Funding for this work came originally from archaeological grants from funds provided by the Department of Environment, Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments,

¹ Hurst & West, 1957

² Owles & Smedley, 1963

³ Layard, 1898, 1907

⁴ West, 1963

⁵ *Ipswich – The Archaeological Implications of Development*, Scole Committee, 1973

and latterly from Manpower Service schemes, utilising school leavers (Youth Opportunities Programme) and, later, unemployed young adults (Community Programme). From 1987, some three years before the introduction of Planning Policy Guideline (PPG) 16, limited developer funding became more available to supplement Central Government and Manpower Service scheme money.

Planning Policy Guideline (PPG) 16 was introduced at a time when large scale excavations in Ipswich ceased, and its introduction had severe ramifications on the post-excavation programme. Problems over inadequate financial resources available for post-excavation analysis were suddenly exacerbated by the original project staff's jobs being changed, making them no longer available to spend time on the publication of the sites; a situation that has not improved significantly since this time.

A total of 36 major archaeological interventions took place between 1974 and 1990. These sites all lie within the historic core of the town; 27 within the Anglo-Saxon and medieval defences, and nine within the medieval suburbs. Publication has thus far mainly been limited to short summaries contained in the annual *Archaeology in Suffolk* section of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History proceedings and short reports in *East Anglian Archaeology* (Dunmore *et al* 1975; Dunmore *et al* 1976). Synthetic works have also been produced.⁶ In 2009 the earliest phase of the St Stephens Lane / Buttermarket sites (IAS3104 and IAS3201) was published, covering a 7th century cemetery. (Scull 2009)

Site narratives, identifying the main site sequences, were written for the major sites and some of the smaller excavations. Site sequences had been dated and checked to ensure stratigraphic integrity.

Dunmore, S., Gray, V., Loader, T. & Wade, K. 1975	The Origins and Development of Ipswich: an Interim Report, <i>E. Anglian Archaeol.</i> , 1, 57-67
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Hurst J. G. & West S.E., 1957	Saxo-Norman Pottery in East Anglia, II, <i>Proc. Camb. Antiq. Soc.</i> , L
Layard, N. 1898	Underground Ipswich, <i>East Anglian Daily Times</i> , 28th September 1898
Layard, N, 1907	'An Anglo-Saxon cemetery in Ipswich', <i>Archaeologia</i> 60, 325-52
Wade, K. 1988a	'Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Ipswich' in Dymond, D., and Martin, E. (eds), <i>An Historical Atlas of Suffolk</i> , 122-123
Wade, K. 1988b	'Ipswich' in Hodges, R., and Hobley, B. (eds), <i>The Rebirth</i>

⁶ Keith Wade, 1988a, 1988b, 1993, 2001

of Towns in the West, AD 700-1050, Counc. Brit.
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