

Site name: 15-17 Lower Brook Street

Site ref: IAS 5502 HER ref: IPS 365 CIMS Accession No: IPSMG:R.2009.41
NGR: TM16484430 Extent: 387 sq m

Circumstances of excavation

Following planning permission being granted for an office development on this large site, south of the junction of Lower Brook Street and Rosemary Lane, permission was granted by Landlink Properties Ltd for prior excavation. The excavation was undertaken by the Suffolk Archaeological Unit during the summer of 1975.

Site Constraints

Funding was only available for the partial excavation of the site and the depth of excavation from the existing ground surface was restricted by the developer. The decision was therefore taken to excavate the area of the former bowling green, on the north half of the site, to the rear of the existing buildings, because it had been terraced into the natural slope and deposits would be less deep. Documentary evidence also suggested that the cemetery belonging to the medieval chapel of Saint Edmund de Pountenay lay in this area.

The site was stripped mechanically to a level at which skeletons began to appear in numbers. This inevitably meant the removal of occasional skeletons which had been buried in shallow graves, but was necessary if the overall aims of the excavation were to be fulfilled. This level also varied across the site: the west end, where burial was denser, was left at a higher level than the east which was almost stripped to the natural gravel.

Following the demolition of 15 Lower Brook Street, the building contractor allowed a small excavation (Area 0598), of limited depth and duration, on the street frontage. The time constraints meant that the top 1.8m had to be excavated by machine under supervision. At a depth of 1.8m, excavation was continued by hand for a further 20-30cm and a series of features isolated and excavated. Natural was not reached in the trench.

After the excavation, a watching brief was carried out during ground works by the building contractor

Funding bodies

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

Stratigraphic sequence (by period)

Early Middle Saxon: c.600-700 (EMS)

Pit 0307, on the main site, contained one sherd of grass-tempered pottery only and is likely to date to this period. In addition, pit 0383, which contained no pottery, was cut

by two MS pits (0315, 0339) and could also date to this period. Only nine sherds of EMS pottery were recovered in total.

Middle Saxon: c.700-850 (MS)

Trench 0598 produced pits and evidence of buildings fronting Lower Brook Street at this period but the main area comprised only pits. Although there were a relatively large number of MS pits, only 1296 sherds of Ipswich ware were recovered, only one imported MS sherd and no sceattas. The earliest coins were a penny (0001/5502N) of Beornwulf of Mercia, deposited 823-840 and a penny (0003/5502N) of Æthelweard of East Anglia (845-855), both unstratified.

Building 0618

The evidence for this building, in area 0598, comprised a gravel floor (0618) with a hearth (0613) associated with a single sherd of Ipswich ware. The hearth had an ash layer (0615) and a vitrified centre (0612) implying that it was industrial rather than domestic.

Adjacent to this were a number of post holes, two of which (0611, 0624) were associated with single sherds of Ipswich ware and one (0621) with Thetford ware, with the remainder undated (0620, 0625, 0627, 0614). Post hole 0614 either cut or was surrounded by gravel floor 0618.

Pits

In the main area, nineteen pits belong to this period (0095, 0103, 0113, 0161, 0218, 0226, 0227, 0229, 0300, 0315, 0339, 0341, 0364, 0369, 0374, 0434, 0447, 0455) with a further three in area 0598 (0605, 0607, 0617). Of this total, only two intercut (0300 cut 0447, and 0227 cut 0315).

The pits varied in diameter from 1.1m to 2.4m and in depth from 50cm to 2.1m. The deeper pits had black peaty organic matter in their lower 20cm. Pit 0369 was unusual, being 3.4m wide with a shelf-like profile. Its lower layers were distinctly cess-like and the remainder had been filled with rubbish. The irregular edge of the feature had the appearance of being trampled and it could have been an open water hole or pond for livestock which had been finally filled with rubbish.

All the other pits were filled with rubbish, including an articulated cow in 0113. Some of the deeper ones could have been wells (0300 and 0455), but no preserved timberwork was discovered, despite the high modern water-table of just over one metre below the excavation plateau level. Others contained faecal material, but it seems probable that they were primarily for the extraction of gravel, used for floors (as in Area 0598) and road surfacing, and that they were then filled with any rubbish available at the time. Despite the relatively small scale of the excavation, the distribution of pits does seem to indicate planning. Few cut each other and the majority lay strung out in an east-west line across the site.

In addition, two post holes in the main area may also belong to this period (0494, 0533).

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

Seven pits (0193, 0224, 0324, 0345, 0368, 0537, 0571) dated to this period on the main site and one pit (0603) in area 0598.

In addition, on the main site, one well (0280) was certainly ELS and one (0390) was either ELS or MLS.

Well 0280

The pit for well 0280 was circular, 2.5m in diameter and 1.3m deep. Below the local water-table at, c. 1.75m OD, there was a circular wood-lined shaft, 70cm deep and 60-80cm in diameter. It comprised seventeen separate staves (8-20cm wide) held together by a wooden band around the outside. Four of the staves had circular holes in them but it could not be ascertained whether they were artificially bored or natural knot holes. Slightly above the height at which this woodwork survived, and nearer the edge of the pit, there was a straight piece of wood lying horizontally and implying a change to a wider, square shaft in the upper section of the well.

Analysis of the timbers yielded a dendro date of after AD 861 and one of the well timbers gave a C14 date of 830+/-70 AD (HAR-2764), confirming the ELS dating.

Well 0390

This was only partially excavated by hand and was later recognised as a well when destroyed by the contractors at which time a single sherd of Thetford ware was found with preserved wood.

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

One building (0370) and one pit (0164) belonged to this period plus some disarticulated human bone in an otherwise undated pit (0524). A St Edmund Memorial halfpenny (895-915) (0005/5502N) was found in LMED grave 0178.

Building 0370 (see scanned plan IAS5502_0370.tif)

This sunken-featured building was 2.8m wide, at least 2.2m long (the eastern end was outside the excavated area) and 80cm deep. There were four postholes around the edge of the pit base, 20-40cm deep (0506, 0507, 0508, 0509) but no trace of any lining.

However, the adjacent gravel was very loose and the vertical edge of the pit, as seen in section, would not have survived without revetment.

The position of the building, well behind the street front, suggests that it functioned as an outbuilding.

The Human Bone from pit 0524

One pit (0524), which appears to lie under an LMED grave (0404), contained a mass of disarticulated human bones, including two skulls. No pottery was associated and the skulls produced a C14 date of AD 940+/-80 (HAR-2778). As no evidence of graves of this date were recorded elsewhere on the site, it is likely that they were disturbed in the medieval period in the vicinity and re-interred in the medieval cemetery (see LMED).

Early Medieval: c.1000-1200 (EMED)

Three boundary ditches (*0057, 0070, 0071*), a building (*0737*), three pits (*0350, 0384, 0367*) and three isolated post holes (*0212, 0214, 0342*) belong to this period on the main site with a further three pits in area *0598* (*0601, 0609, 0610*).

Boundaries *0057, 0070, 0071*

Boundaries *0057, 0070* and *0071* were 'U'-shaped in section and presumably contemporary. As no structural features were associated with them, they are assumed to be ditches rather than palisade fence foundations. A longitudinal section cut down *0070* failed to reveal any sign of posts in its uniform filling. Ditch *0057* was 30-70cm wide and 30-40cm deep and *0070* was 60-75cm wide and 50cm deep.

Ditch *0070*, at right angles to ditch *0057* and ditch *0071*, was aligned east-west. Ditch *0071*, which ran north from *0070* contained two LMT sherds but must be EMED as it is clearly contemporary with *0070*.

Building *0737*

(Postholes: *0398, 0407, 0413-0415, 0420-0429, 0433, 0444-0445, 0458-0459, 0461, 0474, 0485, 0513-0514*).

Only the east, south and part of the west sides of this surface laid building survived with the remainder destroyed by LMT pits (*0431, 0432*). It was of individual posthole construction and the postholes varied in depth and were irregular in shape. On the basis of the remaining walls, the structure had measured c.3.5m by 4.1m.

The dating evidence for this structure is poor with three EMED sherds from posthole *0458*, one Thetford ware and one ?Rhenish grey ware sherd from posthole *0427*.

The three shallow pits on the main site contained little in the way of associated material, but *0384* was sampled for plant seeds. Pit *0609*, in area *0598*, contained a large amount of daub, presumably from the demolished walls of a nearby building.

Discussion

It is suggested that the fences represented by *0057, 0070* and *0071* marked tenement boundaries in the twelfth century with the area excavated forming the north-east corner of one such tenement fronting Brook Street. On the basis of its position, set back from any street frontage, Building *0737* is most likely to be an outbuilding at the foot of the tenement, which had been demolished, presumably by the early 13th century, when pit *0430* was cut inside it.

Late Medieval: c.1200-1450 (LMED)

Two small, shallow pits on the main site (*0248, 0430*) are LMED in date and probably belong to the 13th century just predating the cemetery on the main area. The mechanical excavation of area *0598*, on the Lower Brook Street frontage, cut through a series of clay floors of buildings (such as *0600*, with burnt patches) associated with LMED glazed pottery.

The Cemetery (c.1290-1550)

The remains of some 106 articulated human skeletons were excavated in various states of completeness on the main site. Almost all were supine, orientated with heads to the west. The arms were usually placed by their sides, but the hands were occasionally together across the pelvis. One burial appeared to have been laid on its side (0092), and in one the legs were flexed (0037). Two (0004, 0020), at the east side of the site, were orientated on a north-south axis: 0004 was south-north (head at the south) and 0020 north-south (head at the north) with the two heads alongside each other, suggesting contemporary burial. Their location at the eastern extremity of the cemetery is no doubt also relevant to their unusual nature. The latest pottery associated was Middle Late Saxon but this only provides a *terminus post quem*. The unusual nature of burial presumably means that they were either deviants buried at the extremity of the medieval cemetery or that they are Anglo-Saxon and predate the medieval cemetery.

It seems unlikely that many burials had been lost through the terracing of the site for the bowling green in the 19th century, as it was necessary to strip off up to 80cm from the area by machine before burials started to appear in significant numbers. Burials were denser at the west end of the excavation, nearer the presumed chapel site, under 15 Lower Brook Street, and as many as four superimposed burials were encountered in this area. The watching brief carried out during the contractor's ground works on the site allowed the extent of the cemetery to be plotted with reasonable accuracy.

Documentary Evidence

The cemetery belonged to a chapel dedicated to Saint Edmund de Pountenay (or Pontigny), recorded in the town records as 'the chapel of St Edmund' in 1296 and 1297. The first recorded chaplain was in 1290 (Clegg 1979, 171) and, in 1299, the Register of the Bishops of Norwich described it as the "Capelle Sancti Edmundi Archiepiscopi" (SRO /M/Film JC1/5/3.f.95).

No precise foundation date can be given, but it must lie in the second half of the 13th century, by virtue of its dedication. This is most likely to Edmund Rich, Archbishop of Canterbury (1233-40), who retired to the Cistercian Abbey of Pontigny, where he died in 1242, and was canonised in 1246 (Kirby 1735, 37). We must, therefore, assume a foundation between 1246 and 1290, with a date nearer the latter most likely.

There are a number of references to the chapel throughout the medieval period, including a list of incumbents up to 1424 when it was consolidated with St Helen's parish (Clegg 1979). The documentary evidence indicates that the chapel lay on the south side of Rosemary Lane with the rectory adjacent, occupying the corner tenement between the lane and Brook Street. It seems likely that both buildings were standing until the middle of the eighteenth century when they were replaced by the present brick building (15 Lower Brook Street). The two were known at that time as 'the Stone Houses'.

When burial ceased and the chapel was demolished is not so well documented. During the later 16th century the chapel may have functioned as an almshouse or hospital, and two references are of importance in relation to continuing burial:

“Richarde Sexton put owtt of the Foundation the 20 of August 1583... for whoredome, as he was char (ge) de wytheall, and put into an allmosehowse caulled the Pountnye.” (Webb 1966, 89).

“During the last weeks of 1584, an outbreak of plague occurred in the Pountney almshouses in Lower Brook Street. The authorities evacuated the healthy inmates to safer surroundings, isolated the sick and cordoned off part of the neighbouring lane. The disease seems to have died out during the winter.” (Webb 1966, 114).

It would seem that the chapel ceased this function soon after as a document of 1589 refers to it as “a chapel in a certain piece of land 1 rod more or less in the occupation of J. Wheeler, which chapel was lately called the chapel of St Edmund de Pounteney” (SRO: Redstone XII, Sessions).

The Chapel and Rectory

The only remains of any building which could have been the chapel were the possible robber trenches recorded as context 0086, but it is equally likely to have been located under No. 15 Lower Brook Street, which was retained within the development.

There were no standing remains in 1975 but a ‘folly’ which stood in the grounds of 11 Lower Brook Street, until its demolition to make way for the ‘Scottish Mutual’ building, was built largely out of reassembled stone windows and door jambs, possibly derived from the demolition of the chapel.

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

Cemetery

The cemetery certainly continued in use in the first half of this period and some burial may have taken place into the second half of the 16th century. Five graves were associated with LMT pottery (0003, 0066, 0353, 0363, 0553), including one sherd of Cologne stoneware from grave 0553. However, burial in the cemetery had probably largely ceased by the middle of the 16th century, after which numerous pits were cut through it.

Pits

Nineteen pits were excavated cutting graves in the main area and containing local LMT coarsewares and/or German stonewares (Siegburg/Rären, Cologne). Most of these, especially 0069, 0125 and 0260, contained large quantities of disarticulated human bone.

Two pits, recorded as one context (0086), are of some interest in that they contained brick, stone and mortar from a demolished building. They form a right angle in the north-west corner of the main excavation and have the appearance of robber trenches.

As such, they could indicate the south-east corner of either the medieval chapel or rectory but no additional evidence was recorded during the watching brief.

Bake-house (0520)

A clay floor (0520) with an oven set into it (0587) was revealed in an exit ramp, halfway along the southern edge of the excavation. The oven itself was 65cm wide and, in the section where it survived intact, the walls stood to a height of 40cm below a slightly domed roof. The floor was covered by a thin layer of ash and charcoal and the void above had been deliberately backfilled with clay. The yellow clay floor through which it had been cut ran into the adjoining main area of excavation where it was cut by pit 0476 (16th century), but sealed pit 0462 (also LMT but probably late 15th century) and had sunk into it slightly. Thus it would appear that the floor and oven were LMT in date and probably early 16th century. The red burnt floor of a second oven (0579) survived between 0587 and the main excavation. The yellow clay layer presumably represents the floor of a building containing the ovens.

Boundaries

The watching brief also recorded sections of a flint, mortar and brick wall (0599, 0629, 0630) running east from Lower Brook Street, just south of the southern edge of the main area excavation terminating after some 33m in a flint and mortar lined rectangular cess pit (0632), which contained LMT pottery. This wall appears to be a significant tenement boundary with the cemetery to the north and not to its south. A short stretch of a second flint and mortar wall was found running north-south some 16m east of Lower Brook Street.

In addition a cobbled yard surface (0631) was recorded west of cess pit 0632.

Post medieval: c.1600-1900 (PMED)

Two pits (0023, 0269), a gully (0232) and a brick soak-away, date to this period. The brick soak-away (0027) is probably 18th/19th century and relates to the present 18th century brick building (15 Lower Brook Street). This building encases a timber-framed building of late 16th or early 17th century date, of probable 'L'-shaped ground plan, which presumably butted onto the rectory until its demolition.

ABBREVIATIONS

SRO: Suffolk Record Office (Ipswich)

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Clegg, M., 1979. 'The Chapel of St Edmund de Pountenay in Ipswich', *Proc. Suffolk Inst. Archaeol.*, XXXIV, 171-179
- Kirby, J., 1735. *The Suffolk Traveller*

Webb, J., (ed), 1966. *Poor Relief in Elizabethan Ipswich* (Suffolk Records Society, IX)

