

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA SERVICE

STAFFORD FIELD REPORTS ONLINE

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FR 1.1 Project Summary

The county town of Stafford is today (2009) a small conurbation (FIG 1/1), containing the medieval buildings of St Mary's, St Chad's and the High House within a few metres of each other at the town centre (FIG 1/2, 1/3). The first excavations in pursuit of the early town were carried out by Adrian Oswald, keeper at Birmingham City Museum, who claimed to have found the post-holes of a late Saxon chapel, and a wooden cross buried in a pit, within the foundations of the Medieval chapel of St Bertelin (ST01; FIG 1/2). The campaign reported here began in 1974, when a member of the local archaeological society, Ashley Carter, found a quantity of "Roman" pottery in excavations at Clarke Street in advance of an anticipated ring road. In 1975 Martin Carver (of Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit) identified the pottery as late Saxon by comparison with the pot containing a late Saxon coin hoard previously found in Chester (FIG 1/4). That same year he excavated the Clarke Street site (ST15), unearthing copious quantities of the newly identified bright orange late Saxon pottery that had been dumped in a marsh. In a watching brief in 1977 Carver discovered a kiln at Tipping Street south (ST17), which justified his calling the new pottery *Stafford Ware*. In 1979, in a collaborative project with Stafford Borough and County and the Department of the Environment, Carver carried out an urban evaluation, digging an eventual 28 trenches with students of the Birmingham University

practical course (aka the “year out”) whence he constructed an urban archaeological data base and a model of the deposit for the town (ST18-28, 30-31, 35-51).

In 1980-85, Stafford Borough made available for excavation three large sites in the town centre, prior to their development (known as St Mary’s Grove, Tipping Street north and Bath Street, ST29, 32-3 and ST34; FIG 1/5). These excavations were directed by Jon and Charlotte Cane, with Mark Taylor and Roy Barnes as site supervisors. With Clarke Street, this made four “windows” across the historic town. The excavation supervisors were drawn from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU, now Birmingham Archaeology) who were given a temporary residence in abandoned property in St Mary’s Grove (FIG 1/6, 1/7). The workforce was largely composed of young persons on job creation schemes, the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) and Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP), both of which provided untrained local labour (16-20 years old) with some cash support (FIG 1/8-1/11). Together with students of the Birmingham “year out” these young people undertook a great deal of digging, recording and the sorting of finds, both on the main area excavations and elsewhere in the town (FIG 1/12 and 1/13). Several studies were produced: by Jill Walker (1976) and Jenny Glazebrook (1983) on overviews of the town, by Sarah Bazalgette on the evaluation trenches, by John Darlington on the metallurgy of iron objects (1985) and by Lawrence Bowkett on Stafford’s hinterland. The team also put on two exhibitions of the archaeology of the town, the first in the disused police social club at Bath Street (FIG 1/14) and the second in the High House, both conceived and organised by Charlotte Cane (1/15).

In 1983 Carver began work at Sutton Hoo, entrusting the completion of the publication programme to Jon and Charlotte Cane. Due to a number of unforeseen circumstances, both supervisors moved on and the publication programme stopped. In the late 1990s at the request of BUFAU, Carver repossessed the archive and took responsibility for publication. Four bids for post-excavation funding failed, and the project has been advanced mainly through the good offices of the Department of Archaeology at York. In 2008, Carver completed the compilation of the Stafford archive including the revision of the interpretation of all major excavations, and English Heritage subsequently offered to

support the cost of putting the completed archive online, through the Archaeological data Service.

The outcome is this ONLINE ARCHIVE hosted by ADS (see **FR 1.2** for contents). This archive contains the **Field Reports** for the Stafford campaign, comprising the edited surviving evidence for the evaluation and the major excavations together with studies of the artefacts, bones and plant remains. The original **Field Records** are held by the Potteries Museum at Stoke on Trent. The edited Field Reports include new analyses and reinterpretation by M Carver and take into account work undertaken since 1985, particularly by Debbie Ford (on pottery) and John Darlington (excavations at Stafford castle and town). However, the research undertaken in 1985-90 on the artefacts, animal bone, human bone and plant remains has not been extensively revised or updated, apart from new specialist reports on objects from the “blacksmiths’ pit” (F234 in Int 32): by Steve Ashby on the Medieval comb and Cecily Spall on the metalwork. The Stafford results, summarised below, are considered in their national and international context in the **Research Report**, the monograph *Birth of a Borough* by Martin Carver (Boydell Press), which may be regarded as the synthesis that accompanies and draws on this archive.

Results

The Stafford project is one of the few English urban campaigns to be designed from scratch, beginning with an extensive evaluation project, and it was one of the first urban archaeological data bases to be created (**FR2**). This defined Stafford as a prehistoric peninsula bounded by marshland and the River Sowe. The 1954 excavations at St Bertelin’s Chapel were revisited and its wooden “cross” re-interpreted as a charcoal burial (**FR 3**). Excavations at Clarke Street (**FR 4**) proved to be at the edge of the marsh, used as tip for waste pottery in the 10th century and animal bone in the Medieval period. There were short-lived residential developments in the 12-13th century and again in the 16th century. At St Mary’s Grove (**FR 5**), the sequence began in the Iron Age with four-post granaries. After a lengthy hiatus it began again in the 10th century as a place for delivering, drying and baking grain. It was heavily quarried in the 12th century and developed as residential area from the 13th century onwards, with horn-working, malting and brewing among the practised crafts.

Tipping Street north (FR 6) was the site of a 10th century potters' workshop. It was redeveloped in the 12th century as a smithy and continued into the early 14th as a residence, after which it was abandoned until modern times. Bath Street (FR7) was occupied by blacksmiths in the 10th century and developed as a residence from the 12th century onwards. There were good assemblages of artefacts (FR8), animal bones (FR9) and plant remains (FR10).

In general the pattern of occupation from all sites is consistent. The peninsula was visited by farmers in the Iron Age and Roman period. The first major development of the site can be assigned by radiocarbon dating to the 10th century, aligning it with the documented foundation of the *burh* at Stafford by Aethelflaeda, lady of the Mercians, in 913AD. The excavations showed that this foundation was military in organisation and Roman in style, with a central area ("fort") in which grain was collected and smithing carried out, and a peripheral area to the east ("vicus") in which standardised Roman-style pottery was manufactured. Stafford also had a mint making Roman-style coins. The excavations thus offered a new character for the Anglo-Saxon burh, as a deliberate promotion by Alfred's successors of an English power network in the image of Rome. There were no physical traces of a church in the Anglo-Saxon period, although a foundation in the area of St Bertelins and St Mary's is not excluded.

All the Stafford sites are interrupted in the 11th century, presumably in the context of the Norman invasion and the removal of power to Stafford's castles. Redevelopment began again in the 12th century with a chapel at St Bertelin's and a town church at St Chad's. There was heavy quarrying in the centre, presumably for sand. A blacksmith is established at Tipping Street, and residential property at Bath Street and Clarke Street. Medieval residential occupation continues to the middle of the 14th century (pottery dates), at which point the eastern part of the town is once again largely abandoned. It revives in the 16th century probably as a consequence of the visit of Elizabeth I.

The signal from Stafford is that the borough was born in a rural setting as a result of the vision and action of Aethelflaeda, Lady of the Mercians, daughter of Alfred the Great, and sister of Edward the Elder. She founded the burh in a marsh-bound peninsula, primarily as

a military camp from which to prosecute the reconquest of western England from the Danes. This was undertaken as a venture in imitation of the Romans, using Roman style pottery and coins at a place that was probably already a traditional British delivery point for tribute. The borough was abandoned at the Norman conquest, but flourished again from the 12th century to the Black Death (mid 14th century). The strength of Stafford's location is rural, but subsequent investment in times of prosperity has continued to resuscitate town life there up to the 21st century.

TABLE: *Concordance over the four area excavations*

<i>PERIOD</i>	<i>Bath Street</i>	<i>St Mary's Grove</i>	<i>Tipping Street</i>	<i>Clarke Street</i>
Iron Age		Granaries		Marsh
Roman		Cultivation		Meadow
Sub Roman				Marsh
Late Saxon	Smithy	Grain processing Baking	Potting	Tipping
Norman	Abandon	Quarrying	Abandon	Abandon
Late 12 th	Residence	Horn working	Iron Forge	Abandon
Early 13 th	Residence	Malting	Residence Mortar mixing	Residence
Mid 14 th	Residence	Malting	Abandon	Fire and abandon
14-16 th	Residence	Malting	Abandon	Abandon
16-18 th	Residence	Brewery	Residence	Residence

LIST OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS

The interventions are mapped in FIG 1/16 and described in FR2.3

The site codes are prefixed ST (for Stafford)

- 01 SJ 9210 2318 1954 St. Bertelins Chapel (Oswald)
- 02 SJ 9232 2327 1965 Martin St. (Sherlock)
- 03 SJ 920 235 1965 Chell Road. (Robinson)

04 SJ 9252 2314 1961 Clarke St. (Robinson)
05 SJ 918232 1969 Tenterbanks (Robinson)
06 SJ 92542318 1970 Clarke St. (Carter)
07 SJ 92602315 1970 South Walls (Celoria)
08 SJ 92092305 1971 Water St. (Robinson)
09 SJ 92022344 1971 Mount St. (Robinson)
10 SJ 92072309 1972 Mill St. (Robinson)
11 SJ 92022344 1972 Mount St. (Robinson)
12 SJ 91912394 1972 Greyfriars (Celoria)
13 SJ 92022319 1973 Earl St. (Robinson/Fisher)
14 SJ 92542317 1974 Clarke St. (Carter)
15 SJ 92532314 1975 Clarke St. (Carver)
16 SJ 92312315 1967? Tipping St. (SCoFE?SMSAS)
17 SJ 92432317 1977 Tipping St. (Carver)
18 SJ 9209 2327 1979 6, St. Mary's Grove (Collens)
19 SJ 92372321 1979 Tipping St. (Cane)
20 SJ 91952345 1979 Chell Rd. (Malam)
21 -
22 SJ 92102327 1979 7, St. Mary's Grove (Graham)
23 SJ 91962335 1979 Sainsbury's development (Malam)
24 SJ 92062308 1979 Almshouses (Cane)
25 SJ 92152316 1979 11, St. Mary's Place (Collens)
25a SJ 92142317 1979 11, St. Mary's Place (Cane)
26 SJ 91962337 1979 Chell Rd. (Malam)
27 SJ 919231 1979 SCFE (Cane)
28 SJ 91772328 1979 River Sow (Carver)
29 SJ 92122327 1979 St. Mary's Grove (Cane)
30/31 SJ 91962318 1981 SCFE (Taylor)
32/33 SJ 92362320 1981 Tipping St. (Taylor)
34 SJ 92362321 1981 Bath St. (Barnes)
35/36 SJ 91942321 1981 Bath St. (Taylor)
37 SJ 92482331 1981 North Walls (Glazebrook)

- 38 SJ 92122302 1982 Water St. (Cane)
- 39 SJ 92132317 1983 St. Mary's Place (Cane)
- 40-41 -
- 42 SJ 92222342 1983 Vine Hotel (Milne)
- 43 SJ 92142313 1984 Swan Hotel car-park (Crump)
- 44 SJ 91832323 1984 Broadeye (Cane)
- 45 SJ 92342323 1984 Eastgate St. (Cane)
- 46 SJ 91842324 1984 Broadeye (Milne)
- 47-52 SJ 920232 1985 Albion Place (Darlington)
- 54 SJ 9204 2308 1988 Almshouses garden (Cane)
- 55 SJ 9195205 1988 Tenterbanks car-park (Cane)
- 56 SJ 922 234 1994 Salter Street (Garner)

This list was discontinued in 1994 in favour of the Stafford Town Historic Environment Record (HER) maintained by Stafford County Council Archaeological Office.

<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/environment/e-land/CulturalEnvironment/HistoricEnvironmentRecord>