

FR 1.3 History of the Project

Phase 1: Early work to 1975

The first published formal archaeological research at Stafford was the excavation by Adrian Oswald of the foundations at the west end of St Mary's Church (ST 01, FR3). Oswald, of Birmingham City Museum was encouraged to investigate the site by C A Raleigh Radford, the eminent early medievalist, who noted the documented status of St Mary's and thought it likely to be the location of an early church. The rectangular stone foundations were declared to belong to St Bertelin's Chapel, and a large deposit of woody material buried in a pit in the nave interpreted by Radford as a wooden cross. This cross was subsequently reconstructed and lay for many years in the consolidated foundations. It was seen as a Mercian monument of the 8th century. No archaeological indication of an 8th century occupation of Stafford has since been confirmed. The monument was reconsidered by M Carver in 1984, dated to the 12th century and its "cross" re-interpreted as a charcoal burial (FR3).

The historic borough of Stafford had been subject to only a handful of other observations before 1975, most effectively by P H Robinson and members of the Stafford History and Civic Society and the Stafford and Mid Staffordshire Archaeological Society in the early 1970s (ST 2-14). These were mainly sightings of Medieval pits and pottery.

Phase 2: Investigations at the east end, 1975-77

Alerted by the prospect of a ring road in 1970, Ashley Carter of SMSAS dug two trial trenches on the Clarke Street site, making contact with Medieval and post-Medieval features. As the road became more probable in 1974, he followed with a series of ten test pits further south, striking a bonanza in Pit 10 of pottery thought to be Roman. He made contact with the newly formed WEMRAC (West Midlands Rescue Archaeology Committee) whose director M Carver was then working at Shrewsbury. The pottery was

identified as Late Saxon, by comparison with a pot containing a Late Saxon hoard found in Chester and published by Graham Webster.

In 1975, Carver excavated the Clarke Street site over a period of six weeks, establishing a Roman, Late Saxon, Medieval and post-Medieval sequence (ST 15; here FR 4).

In 1977, Carver, then working in Lichfield, was alerted to the opening of a site south of Tipping Street (ST 17). On a Sunday morning expedition he recovered a large quantity of Late Saxon pottery and recorded a kiln. The pottery could now be officially termed “Stafford Ware”.

Phase 3: Formal Evaluation, 1979

The potential of Stafford for the study of the Late Saxon burh was now evident and in 1979 Carver put together an evaluation programme for the historic core. This was funded by Stafford Borough, Staffordshire County and the Department of the Environment. It comprised a survey of the town and its surroundings, a contour survey of the modern surface from heights taken on roadways and in back gardens (“STAFFTOP”), a review of the documentation and eleven test trenches dug in various parts of the town. These excavations were carried out between 5 March and 22 April 1979 by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit¹ (ST18-28; reported here FR 2).

Phase 4: Targeted Research, 1980-83

The results of the evaluation phase looked promising. In advance of a planned phase of urban development, Stafford Borough made available three large areas for excavation, at Bath Street (ST 34), St Mary’s Grove (ST 29) and Tipping Street north (ST 32/33). These were carried out between 1980 and 1983 by BUFAU, supervised by Jon and Charlotte Cane.

¹ BUFAU 2 (1979), 6-9

Phase 5: Follow up investigations 1983-8

Following the completion of the three major area excavations (ST 29, 32, 34) in 1983, there was an opportunity for a second phase of intervention aimed at checking, verifying or probing key parts of the Anglo-Saxon fabric. Six trenches were cut between November 1983 and April 1984 in attempt to locate the burh defences “but none of them produced the hoped for evidence”² (ST 39, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46).

In practice ST37 (1981), 42 (1983), 44 (1984), 46 (1984), 55 (1988) were designed to test the Medieval circuit and ST 38 (1982) 39 (1983), 43 (1984), 45 (1984), 54 (1988) were in pursuit of a hypothetical smaller Late Saxon burh circuit containing St Mary’s and Tipping Street.³

In 1985 salvage recording in advance of development at Queen Street was undertaken by John Darlington (Stafford Castle archaeologist) (ST47-52). Excavations at Salter Street in 1994 found two kilns of the 11th and the 14th c.(ST56).

Since 1994 interventions at Stafford Excavations have taken place under the PPG16 system. Client reports have been generated some or all of which have been placed in Stafford County’s archaeological office.

Among interventions known to have taken place are:

- Dodd 2000 at Broad Street. Earthworks Archaeological Services E310, Feb 2000
- Foundations Archaeology 2001, 2002, 2003 Sheridan Centre Report 188, 240, 285
- Krawiec 2003 at Earl Street, Birmingham Archaeology 11101.01
- Ramsey 2004 at North Walls. Birmingham Archaeology 1221
- Dodd 2004 at Gaolgate Street. Earthworks Archaeological Services E286, Jul 2004

² BUFAU 7, 13

³ BUFAU 7, Map on p12

- Colls, Cuttler and Hunt at Broadeye, 2003-2007 (continuing from Krawiec 2003).
Birmingham Archaeology.

These have not been given ST numbers, but details should be available via the Staffordshire County Council HER: <http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/environment/e-land/CulturalEnvironment/HistoricEnvironmentRecord>

Urban Archaeological Data Base

The archaeological observations and investigations that have taken place in Stafford were collected initially by Jill Walker for a Bradford University MA dissertation (Walker 1976). From 1975 to 1985 new data was systematically added, and major interventions between 1985 and 2008 have been included as known. The current (2008) state of knowledge is presented in the Catalogue of Archaeological Data in FR 2.3.

Publication

In general the Stafford excavations took place before the issue of PPG16 or in most cases before the establishment of English Heritage in 1983. There has been no obligation by developers, local authorities or central government to realise the rewards of the investment made in excavation. The grant for Clarke Street was £3000 in all, and did not include post-excavation. The 1979 campaign had no post-excavation grant, but the post excavation was largely achieved nonetheless by Sarah Bazalgette during her practical year out. The 1980-83 excavations were supported largely by Manpower Services and Youth Opportunity Schemes, backed up by Birmingham University's student training scheme (the "year out"). English Heritage subsequently supported a post-excavation programme from 1983-8, and considerable progress was then made by Jon and Charlotte Cane. Reports and drawings were prepared for the four main excavations, and the UADB was enhanced. The Canes also carried out experiments on making Stafford ware and drying grain. Plant remains were reported by Lisa Moffett, pollen by James Grieg and Animal bone by Madeleine Hummler (FR 9, FR 10).

The task of bringing this large campaign to publication was daunting, and in 1989 Jon and Charlotte Cane left BUFAU to pursue other careers. About 1993 Martin Carver (Professor at York since 1986) was approached by BUFAU to help complete the task. There were however no grants from English Heritage either to complete the post-excavation or to support the publication. Subsequent applications by Martin Carver for grants from EH (twice), Society of Antiquaries, Marc Fitch, Headley Trust, AHRC, and Leverhulme Emeritus fund all failed .

Accordingly Carver undertook what was in effect a major salvage operation at his own expense, with assistance in kind from the Department in York. In 1994 he signed a contract with the Boydell Press to publish Stafford, but this was to be primarily a general scholarly work rather than an excavation report. The strategy was to write the book and at the same time to create an online archive so that the Cane's work and the archaeological data collected over the years could be placed in the public domain. The perfect vehicle to achieve this now existed at York in the form of the Archaeological Data Service.

Between 1993 and 2007 Carver gathered materials and organised the archive as time allowed. In 2007, a year before his retirement, and 32 years since the start of the Stafford campaign, he finally had a chance to complete the online data ("The Field Reports") and to write the book ("The Research Report"). This was enabled by the Department of Archaeology at York which gave him a sabbatical year for the purpose.

Aug 2008