

EXCAVATION AT MIDDLE BROOK STREET, WINCHESTER, 1953.

INTERIM REPORT.

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Introduction.

IN preparation for the making of a new central car-park and for the widening of St. George's Street, an area of $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres is being cleared between Upper Brook Street and Middle Brook Street, Winchester. As sites in this area become vacant by demolition of property, their archaeological possibilities are explored by trial trenches, with a view to full excavation where this appears desirable. Clearance began in March 1953, with the demolition of houses and a stable, Nos. 1, 1A, 3 and 5 Middle Brook Street,¹ thus freeing a site measuring 90ft. from north to south and 50ft. from east to west at the north-west corner of Middle Brook Street and St. George's Street, lying in the north-eastern quarter of the walled area of the city but near the High Street. Trial trenches dug under the supervision of the Curator of Winchester City Museums proved the existence of a Roman building with a mosaic floor lying under the southern part of the site and extending under the slaughterhouse which adjoins it on the west. The remains were substantial enough to warrant full excavation within the limits of the site, and this was undertaken by the writer on behalf of the Museums and Library Committee of Winchester City Council. The City Council is also financing the digging of trial-holes on the other demolition sites, and by its enlightened generosity it has made possible the first scientific full-scale excavation to be carried out within the area of the Roman and mediaeval city. Hitherto, there has been little to add to knowledge of Roman Winchester since the publication of Haverfield's account in 1900.² Trenches cut in 1951 gave information concerning the Roman city wall,³ and various chance finds contribute some details. Until the 1953 excavation, however, the Roman street-plan was a blank and no mosaic floor had been recorded north of the present High Street, nor had any area been uncovered systematically layer by layer down from the present surface to the natural soil.

1. The houses were brick-built and of little character, but No. 1 had an early nineteenth century staircase on a semicircular plan, with two half-domed niches in the wall. Photographs of this staircase were taken for Winchester City Museum.

2. *Victoria County History of Hampshire*, I, 285-293.

3. *The Ancient Defences of Winchester* (Winchester City Museum publication, reprinted from the *Hampshire Observer* of 15 March, 1952).

The whole project now taken in hand owes much to Alderman R. J. Dutton, Coronation Mayor of Winchester, who has given active and well-informed support to this as to other developments of the work of Winchester City Museums. Both he and Councillor J. S. D. Mansel, Chairman of the Museums and Library Committee, were especially kind and co-operative during my work on the Middle Brook Street site. I am also grateful to the Town Clerk, Mr. R. H. McCall, and the City Engineer, Mr. P. H. Warwick, and his staff, for general help with the arrangements. The Improvements Committee allowed the use of a vacant lock-up garage near the site for storage, and they are to be thanked for tolerating the occupation of much of their embryo car-park. The volunteer helpers, altogether over a hundred, who came from Winchester and elsewhere, some being from overseas, were too numerous to mention by name in an interim report, but their cheerful and willing help made the excavation a very pleasant one. As the site is only a few steps from Winchester High Street and is in full view of the sidewalks bounding it on east and south, onlookers were often numerous while work was in progress, and the proof of their interest and generosity is the sum of over £40 obtained from a donation box at the fence and from the sale of surplus fragments of Roman tile.

My especial thanks go to Mr. Frank Cottrill, Curator of the City Museums, whose unfailing support and sound advice throughout the excavation, and in the preparation of this report, have been invaluable; and to his assistant, Miss Barbara Short.

The excavation began at the end of July 1953. Two paid workmen were employed till the middle of September, but work was continued by volunteer diggers and did not close down till the end of October. By then the uncovering of the Roman structural features was complete, and only a few matters of detail (*e.g.*, a pit under the S.E. corner of the mosaic floor and the bottom of the mediaeval timber structure mentioned below, p. 320) remain for further investigation in another season. At the time of writing it remains uncertain whether the mosaic floor will be preserved *in situ* or elsewhere, and it and the walls have been covered with sufficient soil to protect them during the winter.

The Hampshire Field Club held a meeting on the site on 24 August, when members were shown work in progress and some of the finds.

From the results of trial trenching it appeared that over much of the northern two-thirds of the site the Roman levels had been removed, possibly by erosion and the formation of marsh following some interference with the natural drainage in early mediaeval times. At the present day the water-table here is about 6ft. below street-level, and is probably higher than it was originally. There

were some indications of mediaeval building operations but they were not extensive, and from about 15ins. below the present surface down to water-level or below there is a mass of dark soil, the original surface of the natural soil (finely broken-up chalk) having been removed. In the dark soil was some early mediaeval pottery. At the north end of the site, however, the original ground-surface was found, with Roman pottery of the first century A.D. on it, but no traces of buildings occurred in the trial trenches dug here.

The full excavation of the southern third of the site to a depth of about 4½ft. below present street-level revealed part of the ground-plan of a Roman building bounded on the east by a street. The building has mosaic floors and another of its features is an oven, perhaps for drying corn. The preservation of the remains at such a shallow depth is somewhat remarkable, and it is to be observed that, although they had been cut into by mediaeval pits, there was no sign of any systematic attempt to quarry them for the sake of their materials:

The Roman Street and Building (Plan, Fig. 1; Pl. II).

The Roman street running north and south⁴ along the east side of the site is the first to be located in Winchester. Only a few feet of its width could be exposed in the excavation, but a trench dug further south in the roadway of Middle Brook Street, for repairing a sewer, showed it in section and indicated a width for it of not less than 20ft. measured from the line of its western edge as found on the site. It would appear to be aligned on a point in the south wall of the city at or near the mediaeval Kingsgate, which may therefore have had a Roman predecessor.⁵

The layers of material composing the street show two main phases of construction. In the first phase, before the building was erected, a 4-inch layer of rammed river gravel, bounded on the west by a kerb of flints, was laid directly on the original ground surface, the old topsoil being visible in section beneath it. To this was added later another 4-inch layer of similar material, making the whole about 9 inches thick. In the silt between the two layers were sherds of first century pottery. The later surface was subsequently patched with rammed flints. The second phase was initiated by the digging of the foundation trench of the front (east) wall of the building through the metalling of the first phase, the builders encroaching about 5½ft. on to the street. The new street, contemporary with the building, is of grey sand and about 12ins.

4. Approximately; the bearing of the minor axis of the Winchester lay-out is some degrees E. of N. and W. of S.

5. The Kingsgate is mentioned in the Winchester Domesday of 1149. In the suburb outside it is St. Michael's Church, on which is a Saxon sundial. If this indicates a pre-Conquest origin for the church and the surrounding settlement, it should imply that the gate is at least as early.

thick ; at the level of an offset running along the outside of the wall it is divided by a thin spread of mortar.

To the west of the street, under the building, is an occupation layer, with pottery of the first and second centuries and a second century brooch (Fig. 3). Cutting through this layer, but still earlier than the building, is a pit near the south-east corner. This has been only partially excavated, but it has produced pottery and fine glass ranging in date from about the middle of the first century A.D. to the early third.

Exploration of the building is at present limited by St. George's Street on the south and the slaughter-house on the west, while its north side has been removed by the later erosion referred to above. As so far revealed, it consists of two rooms and an enclosed space on the north ; there may also be an enclosed space on the south.

Room I, the patterned mosaic floor of which is 4ft. below present street level, may be described as a long room or wide corridor, 8ft. 9ins. wide and more than 37ft. long. The walls average 23ins. in thickness and are of coursed flint rubble. That on the south has a shallow foundation two courses deep with an offset on the south side, and it survives up to a height of 14ins. above floor level. It makes a straight joint with the east wall. The north wall is better constructed, having a massive foundation 36ins. wide and 30ins. deep ; there are offsets on both sides, that on the south side being below floor level. It survives to a height of 22ins. above floor level and it bonds in with the east wall. The north and south walls had been rendered with painted plaster on the inside, and the north wall on the outside also ; some of the plaster remaining in position was coloured red, yellow and (on the outside) blue, and there were also fragments of white, green and purple. The east or street-frontage wall of the room has mostly been removed by mediaeval pit-digging, but two brick fragments *in situ* at the south end are at too low a level for a bonding course and may be part of the threshold of a doorway. Tiles set on edge against the inner face of this wall, to form a skirting, might also have some connection with an entrance here, such a feature not occurring elsewhere on the site.

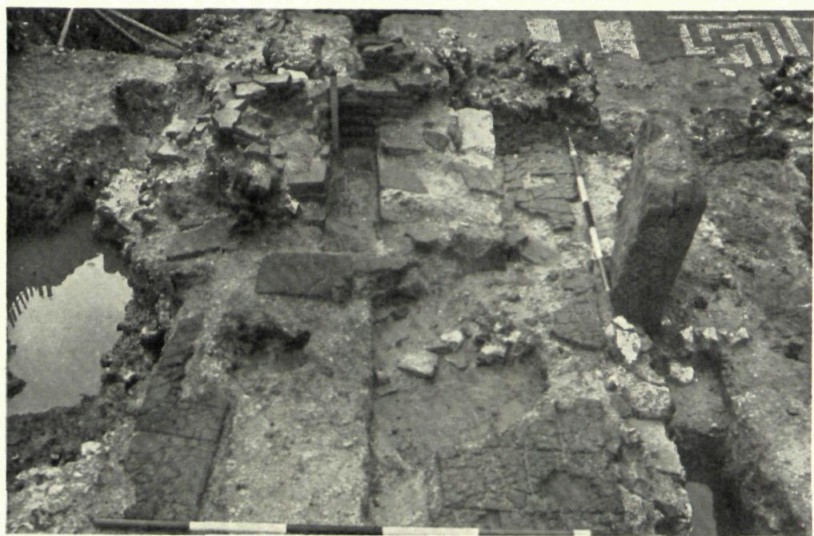
The design of the mosaic floor (Pl. II), in red and white, is 4ft. 8ins. wide, the tesserae being one-inch squares of tile and chalk rock laid on a cement foundation 3ins. deep. It consists of panels of key-motives and of squares within squares, beginning with two broad white bands followed by a half-panel. Mediaeval disturbance has made a large gap, and owing to this and the fact that the total length is unknown the whole scheme of the floor cannot be worked out.⁶ To the east of the design the floor includes a large patch of tiles, some being 8½ins. square and some 10½ins. by 14ins.,

6. The design may be compared with that of a mosaic found at West Park, Rockbourne, Hants. *Journal of Roman Studies*, XXXV, 88 and Fig. 13.

PLATE II.



General view of the site, from the south.



The oven from the north. The rule is standing in the end of the flue.

PLATE III.



Detail of the mosaic floor in Room I.



Bowl of a bone
spoon. $\frac{1}{1}$.



Lead trial-piece for a
Winchester mint coin of
Edward the Confessor
(1042-1065). $\frac{1}{1}$.

neatly fitted against the tesserae. Between this patch and the front wall is another area of tesserae, considerably coarser than those of the main floor and of different colour, overlying a much-worn floor of tesserae similar to those in the border of the main floor. At the junction of wall and worn floor and partly covered by the coarse tesserae is a quarter-round cement moulding, which does not occur elsewhere in the room. The later floor does not extend to the south-east corner, where the floor—again composed of tesserae similar to those of the main floor—and the adjacent part of the south wall have subsided into the soft filling of the pit mentioned above (p. 318). The tesserae here continue under the tiles to the west and it seems that the later tesserae and the tiles were used to repair worn parts of the floor and to cover part of the subsidence—the deepest part of which, however, against the wall, remained unpatched.

The east wall is continued southward by a foundation-trench filled with puddled chalk; whether a wall was ever built on this is uncertain, owing to the occurrence of a mediaeval pit here and the proximity of St. George's Street. Outside the south wall of Room I there is no evidence of a floor or contemporary occupation layer, and the surface antedating the building is covered with debris of flints, mortar and fallen roofing-slabs, which is homogeneous up to the level of the present top of the wall.

Most of Room II, which is north of Room I, lies under the adjoining slaughter-house. The surviving length of its east wall is 15ft., standing up to 19ins. above floor-level; it has an eastern offset and its foundations, 15ins. deep, bond in with the north wall of Room I. Inside, there is a quarter-round skirting moulding in pink cement which preserves the line of the now perished wall-plaster. The floor, as far as it can be exposed, is of red tesserae. Resting on these in the south-east corner was part of a brick, near which two small holes had been driven into the floor.

The area between Room II and the northward continuation of the east wall was probably a courtyard or working space. In it is an occupation layer about 6ins. deep which produced fourth century pottery, including sherds of storage jars. Two small features of brick and pink cement, on the north wall of Room I at the level of the offset, may possibly be the remains of gutter-pipes from the roof. In the east wall is a double bonding course of brick, 15ins. above the offset referred to above (p. 318). Built into the angle of these walls is a structure with a flue for an oven.⁷

7. Whether this was a corn-drying oven rather than an oven for ordinary domestic use is uncertain. Corn-drying ovens described by R. G. Goodchild (*Antiq. Journ.* XXIII, 148-153) have flues which are T-shaped and larger, although he mentions the possibility that simpler structures may often have been used for the same purpose. Facts in favour of the corn-drying theory are: (i) the brickwork of the flue does not appear to have been subjected to intense heat; (ii) the comparatively large and well-constructed platform round the structure rather suggests an industrial use; (iii) being late Roman, the structure is of the period to which corn-drying ovens belong.

built of brick but with some squared stones at the base of the west side (Pl. II). Surrounding this on north and west is a tiled floor, raised slightly above courtyard level; the tiles are cracked by heat and near the mouth of the flue, where a layer of ashes was found, they are worn away. At the western edge of the floor is a re-used moulded stone block, which would appear to have been robbed from a building of some pretension; it is 34½ ins. square and 11 ins. thick, is moulded along all four faces and has a dowel-hole in the middle of one side. It is set on edge in a rubble foundation 1 ft. deep, to the north of a small cobble threshold, and perhaps it formed part of the wall of a shed enclosing the oven. The north end of the floor has been destroyed by mediaeval disturbance.

As already stated, the building overlies material of the early third century. A jug of a type known to have been in use locally in the early fourth century was found outside the east wall, under the street contemporary with the building (see below, p. 322 and Fig. 2, 2). A somewhat earlier impression is given by the discovery of a coin of Probus (276-282 A.D.), in good condition, lying on the patch of coarse tesserae at the east end of Room I, and it may be that the building belongs to the period round about the turn of the third and fourth centuries, when there was some revival of town-life in Roman Britain. The oven with its surrounding tiled floor is likely to have been added soon afterwards, as the fourth century occupation layer found in the courtyard does not continue under it. Fourth century pottery occurred in association with the oven and also in an occupation layer on the floor of Room I. The building might be a house, but until more of its plan is known its purpose must remain uncertain.

The decay of the building is represented by a mass of debris, including plaster and roofing-slabs (of Purbeck limestone from Dorset), lying on the floors to a depth of 20 ins. The east wall of Room I collapsed on to the street. From an occupation layer above the debris come late Roman pottery, fragments of glass vessels imported from Belgium and the Rhineland⁸ and coins of Gratian (367-383 A.D.) and Arcadius (395-408 A.D.)

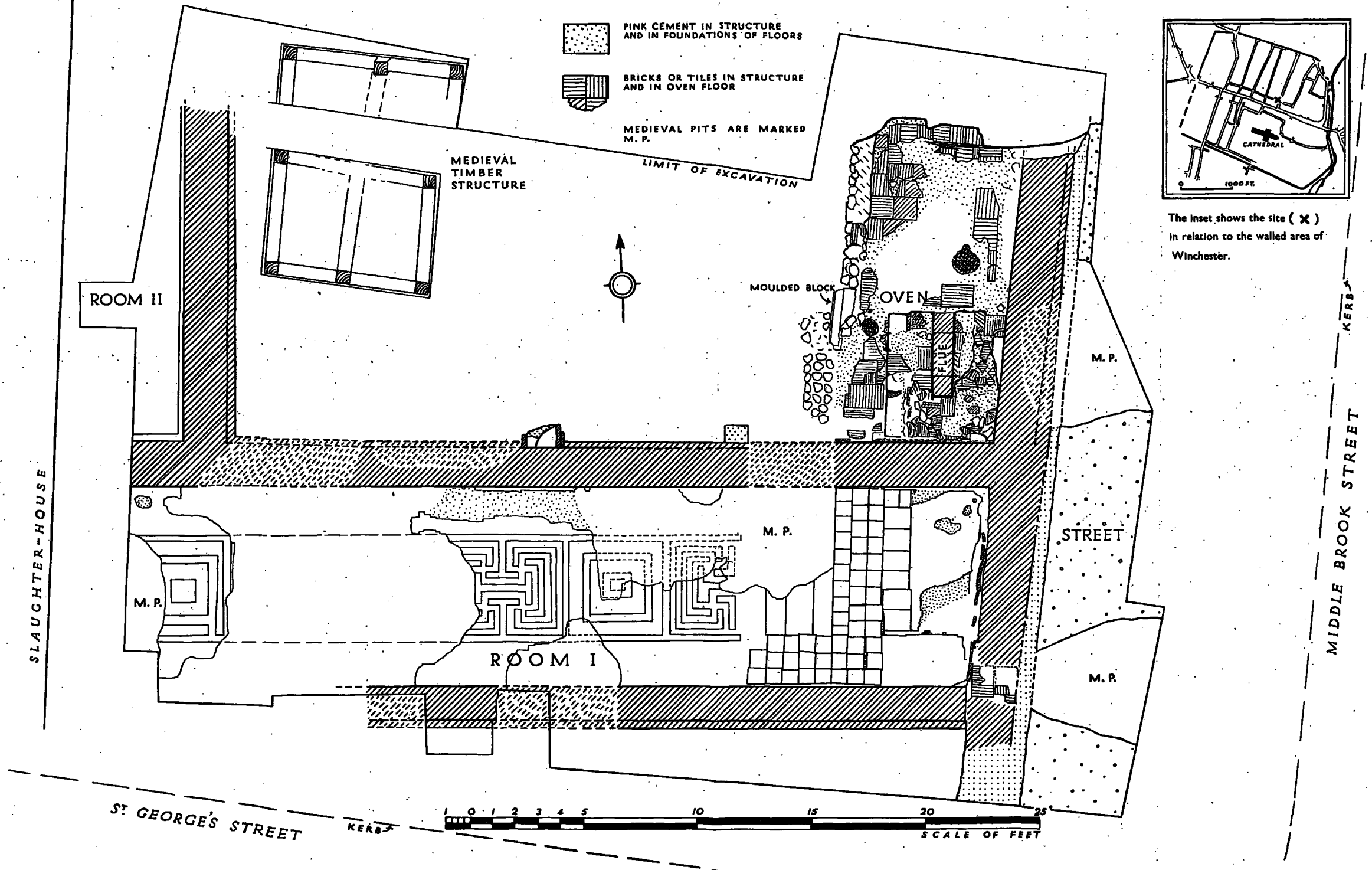
Mediaeval Features.

East of Room II is a pit or tank, 8 ft. by 10 ft., lined with planks on a framework of timbers 6½ ins. square. The damp filling produced pieces of woodwork and a leather sheath, but complete excavation is impossible without a pump and has to await another season. Timber was also found under the south frontage of the site in the large gap in Room I, and it appears possible that the

8. Another Rhenish import of the latest years of the Roman occupation found in Winchester is the inlaid iron knife published in *Antiq. Journ.* XXVI, 70.

FIGURE I.

ROMAN BUILDING AND STREET AT MIDDLE BROOK STREET,
WINCHESTER: PLAN OF THE 1953 EXCAVATION.



explanation of the gap is connected with the making of the structure. From near the gap comes an early mediaeval cooking-pot (Fig. 2, 5) and sherds of similar ware occur in the filling of the structure.

There were various well-marked later mediaeval layers, producing pottery of the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries ; they included chalk floors with holes for posts and stakes.

The Finds.

The following items have been selected from the abundant material recovered, for comment and illustration in this interim report. The excavation registration numbers are given.

Roman Pottery.

Fig. 2, 1.

Base, with foot-ring and internal offset, of a Gallo-Belgic platter, in whitish ware with dark grey smooth matt surface. This, which comes from the filling of a mediaeval pit, is typologically one of the earliest pieces from the site. On evidence from Belgic Colchester its date is likely to be within the first two decades after the Roman invasion rather than pre-Roman ; cf. a platter in the group of Claudian pottery from Clausentum, *Proceedings*, H.F.C., XVII, 257, and Fig. 3, No. 2. MBS/53/430.

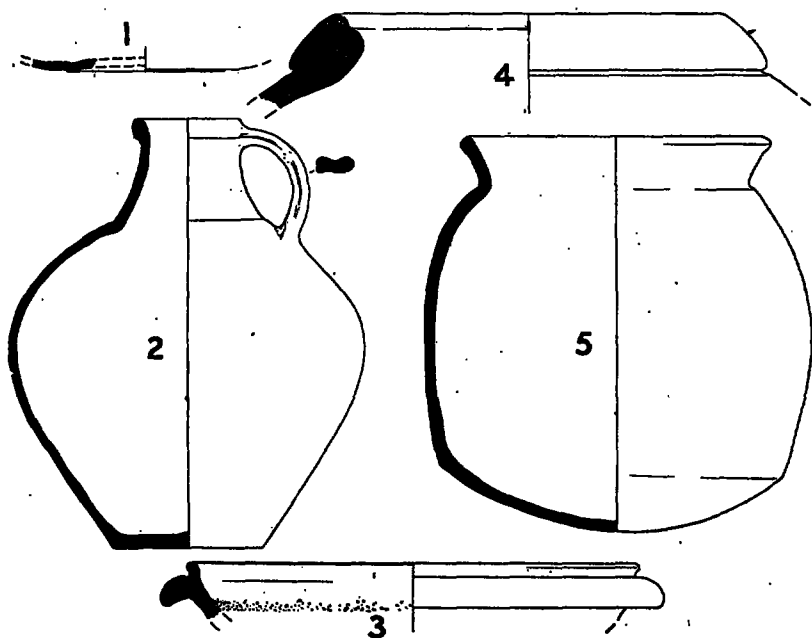


Figure 2. 1-4, Roman Pottery ; 5, Mediaeval Cooking Pot.

Roman pottery of the second half of the first century A.D. found at the north end of the site (p. 317) includes sherds of Samian Forms 18, 27 and 29. MBS/53/TE/44 and 46.

Fig. 2, 2.

One-handled jug in grey ware with remains of black coating, reconstructed from sherds found between the street contemporary with the building and the earlier street (p. 320). Of the same type and ware as the jug (now on loan to Winchester City Museum) found with the hoard of coins of Constantine and his family at Chilbolton Down, five miles north-west of Winchester (*Proceedings*, H.F.C., XV, 212). MBS/53/521.

Fig. 2, 3.

Mortarium in hard ware with light red surface and grey core, from the late Roman layer above the building debris (p. 320). Cf. mortaria from the late filling of the Roman theatre at Verulamium (*Archaeologia* LXXXIV, 258, and Fig. 11, Nos. 29 and 30). MBS/53/TE/33.

Fig. 2, 4.

Rim of large jar with bead rim, in hard light grey ware with burnished surface; same provenance as No. 3. This can be regarded as a late Roman survival of the prehistoric bead rim tradition; cf. *Survey of the Prehistory of the Farnham District* (Surrey Arch. Soc.), 252 and R. 129 on Fig. 108. MBS/53/TE/34.

Fig. 3, 1.

Other Roman Finds.

Bronze brooch found under the floor of Room I. It belongs to Collingwood's Group Q (the head-stud type, with head-loop); second century. All down the front of the bow is a lozenge pattern, probably originally enamelled. There are similar brooches from London (Brit. Mus. *Roman Britain Guide* (1922), Fig. 63) and Woodeaton, Oxon. (Kirk, *Bronzes from Woodeaton*, No. 18, on p. 11 and Pl. II, B 8; this lacks the head-loop). MBS/53/598.

Fig. 3, 2.

Fragment of a jet tablet; the face is curved and has a roughly executed border of triangles. From the Roman building debris in Room I. MBS/53/211.

Fig. 3, 3.

Fragment of a bronze bracelet of three strands twisted together, from the same. MBS/53/211.

Fig. 3, 4.

Fragment of a lathe-turned tubular object of bone, from the Roman building debris. MBS/53/29.

Fig. 3, 5.

Fragment of the base of a glass bottle, showing letters in relief, of a type made in France and the Cologne area in the period c. 275-325 A.D.⁹ Found unstratified, near the oven. MBS/53/60.

Medieval Pottery.

The cooking-pot which is probably contemporary with the timber structure (p. 321, Fig. 2, 5, MBS/53/442) has an everted rim and the usual sagging base; it is of gritty ware, the colour of the surface varying from brown to black. In such features as the wheel-turned rim and the slight step at the junction of neck

⁹ I am indebted to Dr. D. B. Harden for identification of this specimen. The restoration of the stamp is uncertain, but the bottle would be of the 'Frontinus' type.

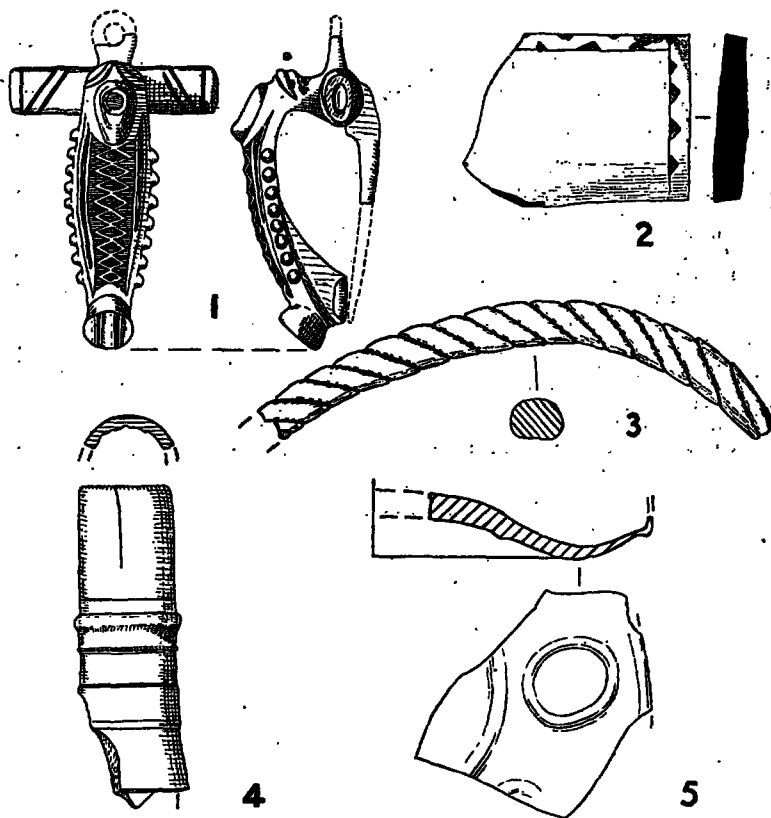


Figure 3. Roman small finds. $\frac{1}{1}$.

and shoulder it may be compared with twelfth century examples from Chichester,¹⁰ and it is probably of this date rather than earlier.

The later mediaeval layers produced fine glazed and decorated pitchers of about the period 1250-1350. One of them (MBS/53/272) has a carinated body on the upper part of which is a row of horseshoes in yellow slip with nail-heads of a dark colour. From a layer on the west side of the excavation came a sherd (MBS/53/554), showing a conventional shield in colour, of one of the fine polychrome jugs which were imported from France (probably the region of Bordeaux) in the late thirteenth century.¹¹

Other Mediaeval Finds.

The most noteworthy single object from the excavation is a lead trial-piece for a Winchester mint coin of Edward the Confessor (Pl. III; MBS/53/313).¹²

10. *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, XCI, 140-150, esp. Fig. 4.

11. *Archaeologia*, LXXXIII, 114-118 and 126-134.

12. I am indebted to Mr. R. H. M. Dolley, of the British Museum, for information kindly supplied by him in advance of his publication of this piece in the *British Numismatic Journal*.

Only two other pre-Conquest trial-pieces are known, and this one is of especial significance in that it shows that Winchester was a die-cutting centre for coins at least as late as the middle of the Confessor's reign (about 1055). It is 23 mm. in diameter and 5 mm. thick. The obverse shows the bearded king in profile, wearing a helmet and bearing a sceptre; the inscription reads EDWARD REX. The inscription on the reverse reads ÆSTAN ON WINCESTI. Aestan was a Winchester moneyer from late in the reign of Cnut until late in the reign of the Confessor. The purpose of the piece would be to test a new die, and perhaps to provide a record of it. An advantage of lead was that an imprint could be taken before the die was annealed.

The bowl of a decorated bone spoon (Pl. III) was found with sherds of cooking-pots of gritty ware, including a wheel-turned everted rim with grey and red surface (MBS/53/525). On the bowl is engraved the figure of a bird and a conventional plant design; on the back of the bowl is a smaller motive. The decoration is similar to that of a complete bone spoon found near the Westgate, Winchester, in 1951,¹³ which may have been made by the same craftsman. The associated pottery might be considered to be in favour of a post-Conquest date, but it must be admitted that although pottery of this class is abundant in Winchester, there is as yet hardly any local evidence for dating it. Dr. W. F. Oakeshott suggests comparison of the motives on the two spoons with some Anglo-Saxon MSS. and other works, such as St. Cuthbert's Stole.¹⁴

13. On loan to Winchester City Museum from the Hampshire County Council.

14. For plant motives on this, see Kendrick, *Anglo-Saxon Art to A.D. 900*, Pl. CII.