

FURTHER MIDDLE SAXON EVIDENCE AT COOK STREET, SOUTHAMPTON (SOU 567)

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ABSTRACT

An archaeological excavation and watching brief took place in advance of redevelopment on a site between Cook Street and St Mary Street in Southampton. A further part of a known Middle Saxon inhumation cemetery was found, bounded on the west by a ditch. Prehistoric and medieval features were also investigated.

INTRODUCTION

Project Background

The excavation (coded SOU 567) was at 6–14 St Mary Street and land south of Cook Street, Southampton, where a hall of residence was to be built by the Southampton Institute of Higher Education. The site is centred at NGR SU 4246 1160 in the St Mary's area, on the west bank of the River Itchen (Fig 1), and lies within Area 5c of the Local Areas of Archaeological Importance as adopted by Southampton City Council. It is located in the south-west corner of the Middle Saxon settlement of Hamwic and about 300 m to the east of the north-eastern corner of the medieval walled town. Several excavations and watching briefs in the area (Fig 1) have produced evidence of medieval and Middle Saxon occupation. The site known as SOU 254, immediately to the north and east of the site, exposed parts of a Middle Saxon cemetery (Garner 1994).

Geology and Topography

The area of Hamwic is located on low-lying land which slopes gently to the south-south-east. The height of St Mary Street is about 3.4 m OD by

Cook Street and at Six Dials, at the northern end of Hamwic, is about 5.5 m OD. The Middle Saxon shore line might have been about 100 m to the west of its present position, and possibly included areas of lagoon, salt marsh and gravel spit (Morton 1992, 20–24).

The approximate height of the modern ground surface was 2.8 m OD at the south end of the site and 3.4 m OD at the north end. The natural deposits encountered at the site were similar to the rest of Hamwic, being brickearth (a variable fine sandy silt – probably a redeposited loess) overlying gravel (*ibid.*, 20).

Methodology and Phasing of Work

The Archaeology Unit of Southampton City Council carried out archaeological investigations at the site between January and September 1994 on behalf of Berkeley Homes (Hampshire) Ltd. The project was supervised by M F Garner, and the finds were processed by L Ford and V Allen. The human bone report was written by J I McKinley in November 1994.

The methodology was specified in four schemes of investigation (Berkeley Homes (Hampshire) Ltd 1993a; 1993b; 1994a; 1994b). Two trenches, referred to as Trenches 6 and 8, were excavated, and Trench 7 denotes the watching brief on the rest of the development area (Fig 1). Trench 6 was 11 m long and 10 m wide. The trench was excavated to a maximum depth of 2.03 m (0.83 m OD). Trench 8 was 5.5 m long and 4 m wide. It was excavated to a maximum depth of 0.93 m (1.75 m OD). The observed groundworks comprised pile holes, ground-beam trenches, and service trenches.

The main purpose of the excavation was 'to

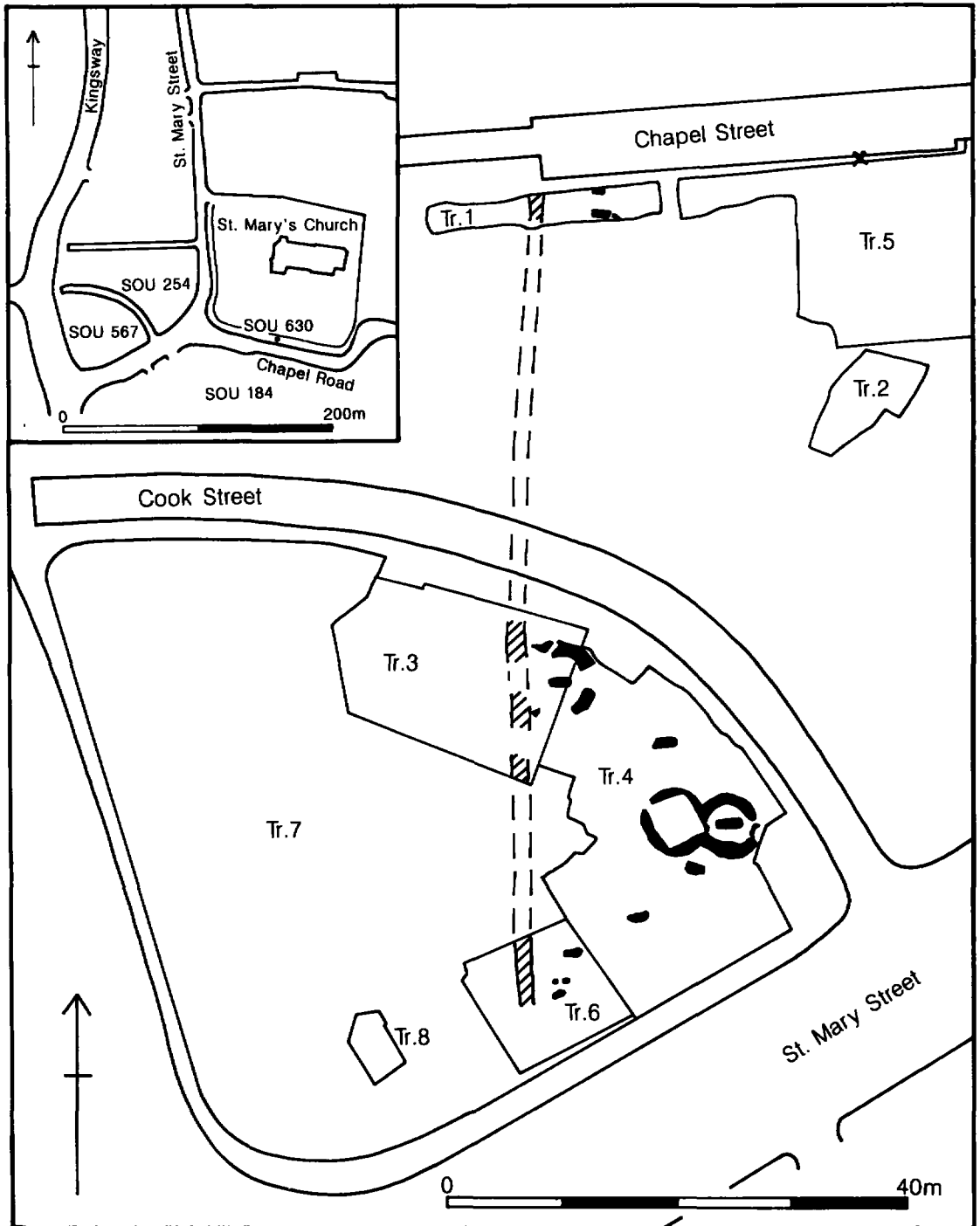


Fig 1 Plan of boundary ditch (hatched) and cemetery (solid) in the Cook Street area. Trenches 1 to 5 are SOU 254 and Trenches 6 to 8 are SOU 567. X marks the location of an observed grave.

identify and remove human remains in advance of redevelopment' (Berkeley Homes (Hampshire) Ltd 1993a, 1). The aims of the watching brief were 'principally to determine the presence or absence of human use of the area, and the date, state of preservation, and extent of that use; to recover associated objects; and to record such evidence as does survive' (Berkeley Homes (Hampshire) Ltd 1993b, 1).

All contexts and finds were recorded using the Southampton City Council Archaeology Recording (SMART) system. The archive, including the finds, is deposited with Southampton City Council City Heritage Section. The archive comprises details of the project together with 361 SMART forms, 42 drawings, 174 colour slides, 177 monochrome negatives (and contact prints), 15 boxes of finds, and 3 Harris matrix sheets.

RESULTS

The results are reported in chronological order from the oldest to the most recent.

Natural Deposits

The oldest deposits revealed were natural river gravels (contexts 5074, 5100, 5115, 5116, 5117, and 5118/5127). Overlying the natural gravels were layers of yellowish brown sandy clay loam (brickearth). This was numbered 5019, 5208, and 5212. All these layers were probably of natural origin.

Possible Prehistoric Contexts

Above the natural brickearth was a layer of slightly stony, yellowish brown silty clay loam containing burnt flint, numbered 5119 and 5122 in Trench 6 and 5203 in Trench 7. Layer 5122 was cut by pit 5120 (Fig 2A), filled with 5121, a slightly stony, yellowish brown silty clay loam containing burnt flint. Overlying 5121 was layer 5020, a slightly stony, light olive brown silty clay loam containing burnt flint and two sherds of prehistoric pottery. In Trench 8 four layers of mixed brown to light yellowish brown silty clay loams

were recorded as 5303, 5307, 5308 (the latter two containing burnt flint), and 5309.

Nine struck flint flakes were recovered from Middle Saxon and unstratified contexts.

Possible Early Middle Saxon Features

Three features in Trench 6 could not be closely dated. They were two pits (5042 and 5075) and a post-hole (5110), and they were earlier than the Middle Saxon ditch and cemetery (Fig 2A). The fills of these features were similar, containing few datable finds, mostly small quantities of burnt flint, charcoal, daub and animal bone. The evidence from SOU 254 pointed to a predominantly agricultural phase at the beginning of the Middle Saxon period in this part of Hamwic and these features would be consistent with such activities. Alternatively they could be prehistoric, or it could be argued that the prehistoric evidence above belongs in this phase.

Pits

Pit 5042 cut the natural gravel and was cut by Middle Saxon ditch 5060. It was at least 2.2 m long, 1.75 m wide, and 1.2 m deep. Its west edge had been removed by the ditch, and most of its other edges by medieval and later disturbance. It contained ten fills. The fills are described in stratigraphic order from bottom to top. Fill 5109 was yellowish brown sandy clay. Fill 5108 was extremely stony, brown sandy clay loam. Fill 5112 was dark greyish brown silty clay with common charcoal flecks. Fill 5107 was slightly stony, brown silty clay loam with few charcoal flecks. Fill 5106 was slightly stony, dark greyish brown silty clay loam with common charcoal flecks, a few fragments of daub and burnt flint and 33 fragments of animal bone. Fill 5102 was dark yellowish brown sandy clay loam with fragments of daub and animal bone. Fill 5101 was moderately stony, dark yellowish brown sandy clay loam. Fill 5126 was yellowish brown sandy clay loam. Fill 5043 was slightly stony, very dark greyish brown silty clay loam with fragments of animal bone, slag, and one small sherd of medieval pottery, which has been interpreted as intrusive. Fill 5123 was slightly stony, sandy clay, with animal bone and daub fragments.

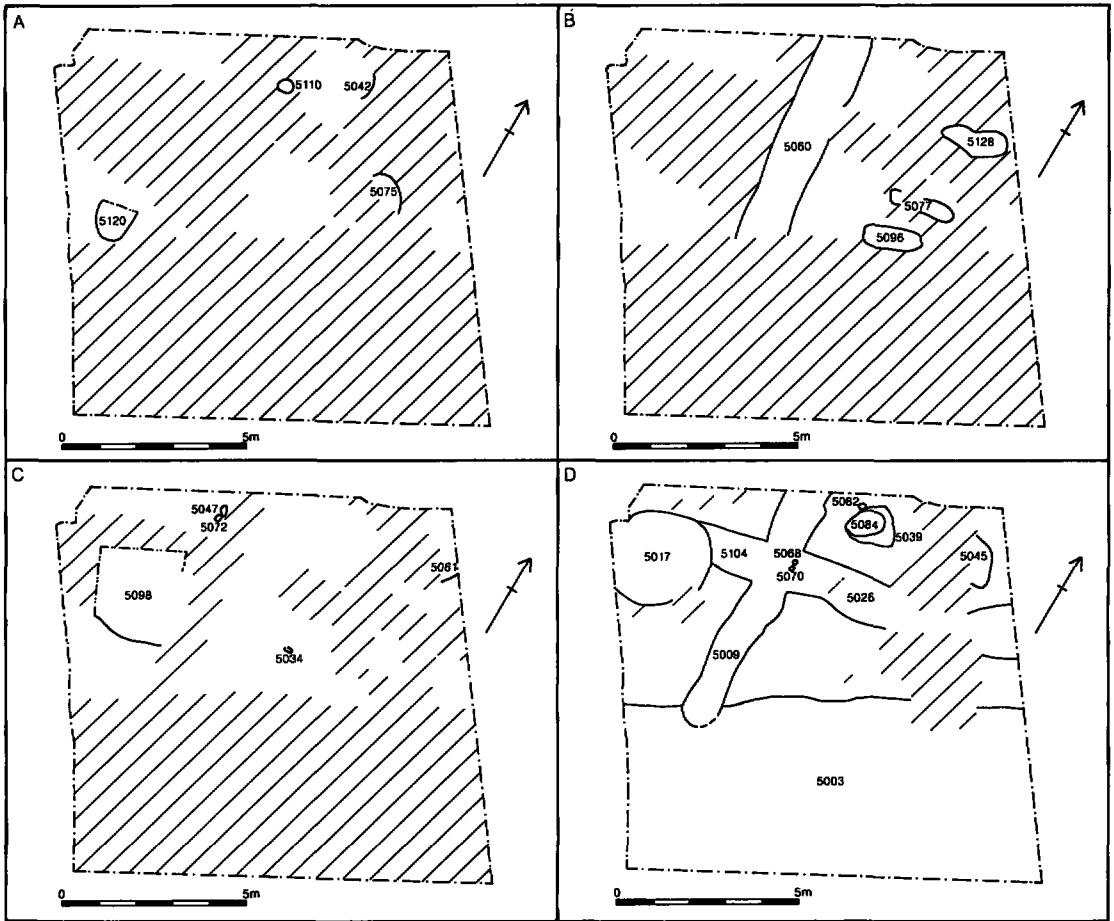


Fig 2 Features in Trench 6 (A) prehistoric (5120) and possible early Middle Saxon, (B) Middle Saxon, (C) uncertain Middle Saxon, and (D) medieval. Later disturbance is hatched.

Pit 5075 cut natural brickearth and was cut by Middle Saxon grave 5077. It was small compared with the other Middle Saxon pits to the north, and contained fill 5076, a slightly stony, brown silty clay loam with a few flecks of charcoal.

Past-hole

Feature 5110 was probably a post-hole. The top of the feature had been removed by the cutting of Middle Saxon ditch 5060 (see below). The surviving fills from bottom to top were contexts 5111, 5113, 5114, 5125, and 5124, all sandy silt loams. No finds were recovered.

Middle Saxon Evidence

Middle Saxon evidence was confined to Trench 6 (Fig 2B). It consisted of part of a cemetery, a ditch, and a layer of soil.

The Cemetery by M F Garner and J I McKinley

Three graves, all aligned east-west, were located (Figs 2B and 3). The human bone was analysed by J I McKinley, using the same methodology as that used on the skeletons from SOU 254 (McKinley & Garner 1994, 88–89). The bone was in very poor condition and some was so fragile that it did not

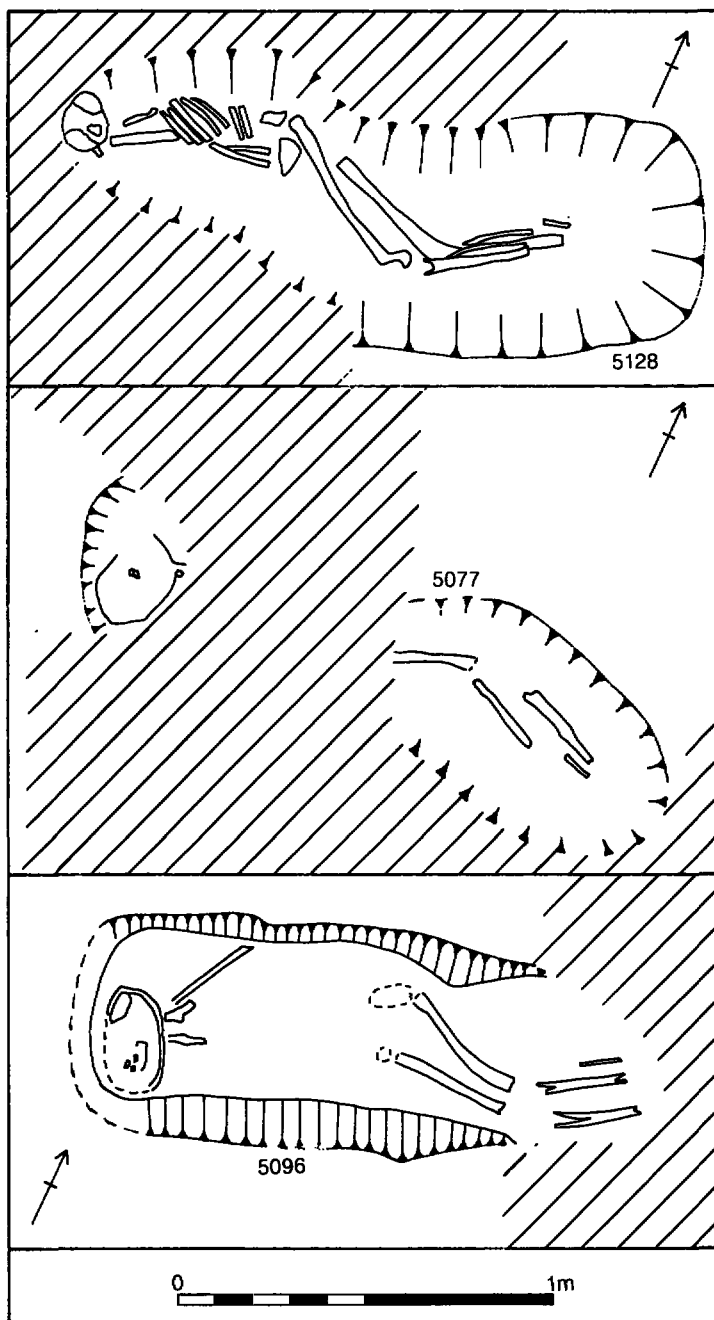


Fig 3 The graves, later disturbance is hatched.

survive excavation and cleaning. The small size of the group and the low level of bone survival precludes any demographic comment.

Grave 5096 cut prehistoric layer 5119. It contained skeleton 5103. This consisted of a badly decomposed skull and long bones lying east-west with the skull at the west end. The grave also contained fill 5097, a deposit of sandy clay with occasional fragments of burnt flint.

Grave 5096: Inhumation 5103

c. 15% bone recovery; elements of skull, upper and lower limb.

Age: mature adult (25–45 yr). Sex: ?female.

Morphological variations: large 5-cusp variation to mandibular M3.

Grave 5128 was cut into the natural brickearth, and contained skeleton 5130. This consisted of the base of the skull, parts of long bones and some ribs. The remains were lying east-west with the skull at the west end. The grave also contained fill 5129, a fairly stony, brown silty clay loam with flecks of charcoal.

Grave 5128: Inhumation 5130

c. 15% bone recovery; elements of skull, axial, upper and lower limb.

Age: mature adult (25–45 yr). Sex: male.

Morphological variations: osteoarthritis – acetabulum.

Grave 5077 was cut into the fill of early Middle Saxon pit 5075, and contained skeleton 5094. This consisted of a skull, at the west end, and the long bones of the legs. The middle part of the skeleton had been damaged by the removal of a concrete foundation during the site clearance. The grave was filled with 5078/5092 a slightly stony, greyish brown silty clay loam. It included a sherd of Middle Saxon pottery.

Grave 5077: Inhumation 5094

c. 10% bone recovery; elements of skull and lower limb.

Age: young/younger mature adult (18–30 yr).

Sex: ??female.

Morphological variations: large 5-cusp variation to mandibular M3.

All three skeletons were lying east to west with the head at the west end. This suggests Christian burials. The absence of grave goods further reinforces this hypothesis. The poor condition of the remains and their location suggests that they were contemporary with, and part of, the adjacent cemetery, dated to the early 8th century (McKinley & Garner 1994).

Ditch

Ditch 5060 (Fig 2B) cut through early Middle Saxon pit 5042 and post-hole 5110, and through prehistoric layer 5119. The bottom fill of the ditch was 5093, a brown silty clay loam containing burnt flint and animal bone fragments. Above that was 5088, a yellowish brown silty clay loam containing animal bone, burnt flint, five sherds of Middle Saxon pottery and one sherd of Roman pottery. Above that was 5036, a slightly stony, dark greyish brown silty clay loam with burnt flint, animal bone, abundant charcoal, and daub with wattle impressions. This was overlain by 5041, a slightly stony, yellowish brown silty clay loam which contained a few fragments of animal bone, charcoal, hammerscale, very few fragments of mussel shell, slate and burnt flint, and a sherd of pottery of possible Middle Saxon date.

Above the Saxon ditch was layer 5090, a slightly stony, dark greyish brown silty clay loam with a few fragments of mussel shell, charcoal, burnt flint, and animal bone together with small inclusions of brickearth. It was perhaps the beginning of a soil formation in the Late Saxon or early medieval period.

Uncertain Middle Saxon Features

A number of features in Trench 6 could not be closely dated (Fig 2C). They were cut by medieval and modern features. Two pits (5098 and 5061) with possible early Middle Saxon pit 5042 formed a north-east to south-west alignment, with another pit (possible early Middle Saxon pit 5075) to the south. There were also two stake-holes (5034 and 5072) and a post-hole (5047). The fills of these

features were similar, containing few datable finds, mostly small quantities of burnt flint, charcoal, daub, and animal bone. The date of these features could be anything from prehistoric to medieval based on their stratigraphic relationships. The absence of medieval finds makes it unlikely that they were medieval.

Pits

Pit 5098 cut prehistoric layer 5020 and contained fill 5099, a slightly stony, pale brown silty clay loam. Daub, animal bone, worked flint, and burnt flint were recovered from the fill.

Pit 5061 cut natural brickearth and was in turn cut by medieval pit 5045. It was at least 2m by 0.6m, and it contained four fills. The lowest was fill 5067, a slightly stony, brown silty clay loam with few charcoal flecks, burnt flint and one piece of animal bone. It was overlain by 5066, a very stony dark brown silty clay loam with common charcoal flecks and burnt animal bone. Above 5066 was 5065, a fairly stony dark brown silty clay loam with common small lenses of yellowish brown silt loam and charcoal flecks. It included a small fragment of iron. Above 5065 was 5062, a fairly stony, dark brown silty clay loam with very few daub and charcoal flecks and burnt flint.

Stake-holes

Feature 5072 cut natural brickearth by 50 mm. It was originally at least 160 mm by 120 mm and was probably a stake-hole, but it is possible that it was a small post-hole. It contained 5073, a dark greyish brown silty clay loam with one sherd of Middle Saxon pottery.

Stake-hole 5034 cut the natural brickearth. It contained 5035, a slightly stony, dark greyish brown silty clay loam with no finds. It could be any date between prehistoric and modern but was probably Middle Saxon.

Post-hole

Post-hole 5047 cut feature 5072. It contained 5048, a slightly stony, brown silt loam.

Overlying the natural brickearth in one area was a layer of brickearth, 5081, that contained charcoal and daub, and one sherd of Middle Saxon pottery. Layer 5081 may have been deposited in the Middle Saxon period.

Medieval Evidence

Medieval evidence was found in all three trenches. It consisted of a hollow way, ditches, pits, two stake-holes, and a post-hole. There were also layers of plough soil.

Hollow way

In Trench 6 feature 5003 cut Middle Saxon ditch 5060 and grave 5096 (Fig 2D). It was at least 5 m wide and oriented north-east to south-west. It was partially excavated along the north-west edge to a maximum depth of 1.47 m OD. The lowest fill exposed was 5004, a very dark greyish brown silty clay loam with fragments of animal bone, stone, and burnt flint, and a sherd of early medieval pottery. Overlying it was 5033, a very stony brown silty clay loam. Above that was 5008, a very dark greyish brown silty clay loam, and above that was 5007, a yellowish brown brickearth. Above 5007 was 5006, a very dark greyish brown silty clay loam. The top fill, 5005, was a yellowish brown brickearth. No finds were recovered from fills 5033, 5008, and 5007. This feature has been interpreted as a continuation of hollow way 2104 in Trench 4 of SOU 254 (Garner 1994, 79).

Ditches

Two ditches were found in Trench 6 (Fig 2D). They were east-west ditch 5104/5026, and north-south ditch 5009.

Ditch 5104/5026 was cut into the fills of Middle Saxon ditch 5060, grave 5128, and uncertain Middle Saxon pit 5098. Its bottom fills were: 5105, a fairly stony dark brown silt loam; and 5044 a silty clay loam with many coarse brickearth inclusions containing fragments of animal bone and one sherd of Roman pottery. Above them were 5023, a greyish brown silty clay loam which contained high medieval pottery, and 5027, which was the same deposit as fill 5010 of ditch 5009.

Ditch 5009 cut the top fill (5004) of hollow way 5003. It was oriented north-south and contained 5010, a very dark greyish brown silty clay loam with animal bones, daub and burnt flint.

Ditches 5104/5026 and 5009 were probably contemporary and formed a system. The west end of ditch 5026 became progressively more shal-

low as it approached ditch 5009. This could indicate that ditch 5009 was dug first. There were two stake-holes in the base of ditch 5026 (see below).

Pits

In Trench 6 feature 5084 (Fig 2D), a pit with three fills, cut into the fill of Middle Saxon pit 5042. The bottom fill, 5089, was a slightly stony, yellowish brown sandy clay loam containing a sherd of high medieval pottery. Above 5089 was 5087, a fairly stony, dark brown silty clay loam with lenses of yellowish brown silty clay and a slightly stony, very dark greyish brown 'spongy' silty clay loam which contained a few fragments of hammerscale, slate and charcoal, fragments of animal bone, mussel shell, mortar and limestone, and five sherds of medieval pottery. This deposit was sealed by 5085, a very stony, very dark greyish brown silty clay loam with common fragments of slate, and a few fragments of charcoal, mortar, daub, animal bone, hammerscale and burnt flint. It also contained fourteen sherds of medieval and one sherd of post-medieval pottery.

Cut into the top fills of medieval pit 5084 was pit 5039. It had two fills. Fill 5057 was a fairly stony, dark greyish brown sandy clay loam with lenses of yellowish brown sandy clay. It contained tile (Roman or medieval) and high to late medieval pottery. The top fill 5040 contained a mix of post-medieval and medieval artifacts.

Also in Trench 6 was pit 5045, which cut uncertain Middle Saxon pit 5061. Its fill 5046 was a slightly stony, very dark greyish brown silty clay loam with a few fragments of oyster shell and charcoal. Also present were fragments of animal bone, limestone, slate, and tile, and nine sherds of late medieval pottery as well as earlier residual sherds.

Cut into medieval ditch 5104 and medieval layer 5023 in Trench 6 was pit 5017. It contained fills 5018, 5022, 5086, and 5095. The lowest fill, 5095, was a fairly stony, dark brown silty clay loam. It contained fragments of charcoal, slate, hammerscale, animal and fish bone, mussel shells, cereal grains, burnt clay, and burnt flint. Also present were iron nails, mortar, slate, stone, fifteen sherds of medieval and one sherd of Roman pottery, and a fragment of a quern-stone. The top

fills of the pit, 5022, 5018, and 5086 were post-medieval to modern in date.

During the watching brief (Trench 7) pit 5206 was observed. It cut natural brickearth. Its fill (5207) was a slightly stony, very dark greyish brown silty clay loam with charcoal, a fragment of sandstone, and tile and medieval pottery.

In Trench 8 pit 5305 cut prehistoric layer 5307. It contained 5306, a very dark greyish brown silty clay loam with common brickearth mottles, and limestone and burnt flint fragments.

Stake-holes

Stake-hole 5068 contained 5069, a slightly stony, dark greyish brown silt loam containing a few fragments of mussel shell, charcoal and a small droplet of lead.

Stake-hole 5070 contained 5071, a slightly stony, dark greyish brown silt loam.

Both stake-holes cut natural brickearth in the west end of medieval ditch 5026. The fills of the stake-holes were below the lowest fill (5044) of the ditch. It is possible that stakes were used as markers before, and to facilitate, the digging of the ditch system (5026/5104 and 5009).

Post-hole

Post-hole 5082 contained 5083, a slightly stony, dark brown silty clay loam. It cut the fill of Middle Saxon ditch 5060 and was cut by medieval pit 5084.

Plough soil

In Trench 7 layers 5202 and 5205, slightly stony, very dark greyish brown silty clay loams, contained medieval pottery, burnt flint, animal bone, stone and slate. A similar layer in Trench 8 was 5302. They have been interpreted as plough soils of probable medieval date.

Post-Medieval and Modern Contexts

Contexts of these dates were encountered in all trenches, full details being in the archive.

SUMMARY

The earliest deposits exposed were the natural valley gravel layers overlain by brickearth. Above

the brickearth were prehistoric layers of contaminated brickearth. Most of them contained burnt flint. Pit 5120 was sealed by one of these layers. Some of the undated features may belong to this period. Nine residual struck flint flakes were recovered.

The Middle Saxon period possibly began with agricultural activity marked by pit digging and a post-hole. The lack of domestic rubbish makes it hard to assign these features to a definite period. The three graves contained incomplete badly decomposed skeletons. They were all lying east to west with the head at the western end and were probably Christian and contemporary with the adjacent early 8th century cemetery (McKinley & Garner 1994).

The ditch contained Middle Saxon pottery together with charcoal and daub with wattle impressions. It is on the same alignment as the ditch in SOU 254 Trench 3 (Garner 1994). Other Middle Saxon features may have been dug after the cemetery had gone out of use but was still visible. Overlying the ditch was a layer of soil 5090. This perhaps formed in the Late Saxon period.

Feature 5003 has been interpreted as a hollow way cut after the Middle Saxon phase of occupation but filled in again during the medieval period when it was cut by ditch 5009. Ditches 5009 and 5104/5026 shared a fill and were probably contemporary and part of the same system. They may have been field or property boundaries. Other medieval pits suggest continued use of the area throughout the medieval period.

DISCUSSION

Middle Saxon

The relationship of the ditch to the cemetery and to the rest of Hamwic was not resolved by the evidence at SOU 254. There were no definitely Middle Saxon features to the west of the ditch, and the ditch was considered to be a western boundary, either to the cemetery, or to the town of Hamwic, or to both (Garner 1994, 121). The evidence at SOU 567 does not help to resolve the question. If the ditch had turned east around the

cemetery, or the ditch had continued but the cemetery had not, the puzzle would have been solved, but both the ditch and the cemetery continued to the south.

However the line of this ditch is now known for a further 20 m from its southernmost point on SOU 254. Its orientation was similar to that on SOU 254 being approximately north-south but it turned slightly to the east. Excavations at the Deanery (SOU 184), to the south-east of the Cook Street sites, revealed part of a ditch in the south-west corner of the site (Garner 1994, 120). The ditch was oriented approximately south-east to north-west, and it was shallow with a U-shaped profile. It has been suggested previously that despite the differences in dimensions of the SOU 254 ditch and the SOU 184 ditch they were parts of the same feature (*ibid*, 121), and the evidence from SOU 567 reinforces the suggestion because the gap between the known parts of the ditch has been reduced to 55 m, and their orientations allow them to be connected by a gentle curve.

The line of this feature approximately coincides with the south-western limit of known Middle Saxon activity. No graves were found in the trenches excavated at SOU 184. If the Cook Street ditch was the same as the ditch at SOU 184 then it is likely that it was not designed as a boundary to the Cook Street cemetery.

The southern limit of the cemetery was probably not revealed at SOU 567. The southernmost grave was cut by the northern edge of the hollow way. Any graves further to the south would have been totally removed by the hollow way due to its greater depth. The date of the origin of hollow way is uncertain. At SOU 254 the evidence suggested that it was Late Saxon in origin and was filled in during the late medieval period, but it is possible that it was Middle Saxon and it might have formed the southern boundary to the cemetery.

At SOU 254 there were 'no Middle Saxon features definitely earlier than the ditch' and 'the ditch was probably dug to mark a boundary early in the 8th century before there was intensive Middle Saxon use of the area' (Garner 1994, 121). At SOU 567 the ditch cut features (5110 and 5042) of probable Middle Saxon date, so there was activity in this part of Hamwic before the ditch

was dug. The nature and exact date of this activity is uncertain.

The SOU 567 investigation has added to but not substantially changed our understanding of the Cook Street cemetery and its relationship to the ditch and layout of this part of Hamwic. Further investigations in the area, particularly around Central Hall between the two known lengths of ditch, might resolve some of the questions.

Medieval

The medieval evidence found at SOU 567 was similar to that at SOU 254 and the nature and date of activities at SOU 567 can only be understood by reference to SOU 254. Unfortunately, the evidence from SOU 254 has not been fully analysed but a synthesis is attempted here.

At both sites the quantities of finds, features, and deposits were greater for the medieval period than the Middle Saxon. The evidence consists of ditches, pits, structural features, a hollow way, and a well. There was a fairly homogeneous dark soil across both sites, up to 1m thick at the west and thinning to virtually nothing at the east. The upper parts of some Middle Saxon features had been truncated, probably by ploughing. The two ditches, probably field boundaries, were generally earlier than the domestic occupation. This suggests a long standing use of the area for agricultural activities from the end of the Middle Saxon period.

Domestic occupation is marked by structural features, mostly close to St Mary Street, with pits generally being found further from the street, probably in the backyards. Most of these features

were probably late medieval. This is also when the hollow way was filled in, suggesting a re-alignment of this part of St Mary Street at this period, perhaps when the area was being re-occupied.

CONCLUSION

The Middle Saxon evidence from SOU 567 is important as it gives a minimum dimension to the cemetery of some 75 m north to south, making it the largest of the Hamwic burial grounds, perhaps apart from that around St Mary's Church. When the SOU 254 cemetery was published there was no physical evidence for a graveyard around the Church but subsequent work at SOU 630 in Chapel Road (Fig 1) has shown that there were burials there in the 8th/9th centuries (Smith 1995), closing the chronological gap between what is assumed to be the main burial ground of Hamwic and the smaller, earlier cemeteries that served the growing town.

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