

TWO MEDIEVAL EXTRA-MURAL SITES IN SOUTHAMPTON

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ABSTRACT

Small-scale excavations undertaken in 2004 on two sites on the east side of the medieval walled town have provided limited though useful information on the extent of Southampton in the 11th and 12th century, the town defences and subsequent extra-mural land use.

INTRODUCTION

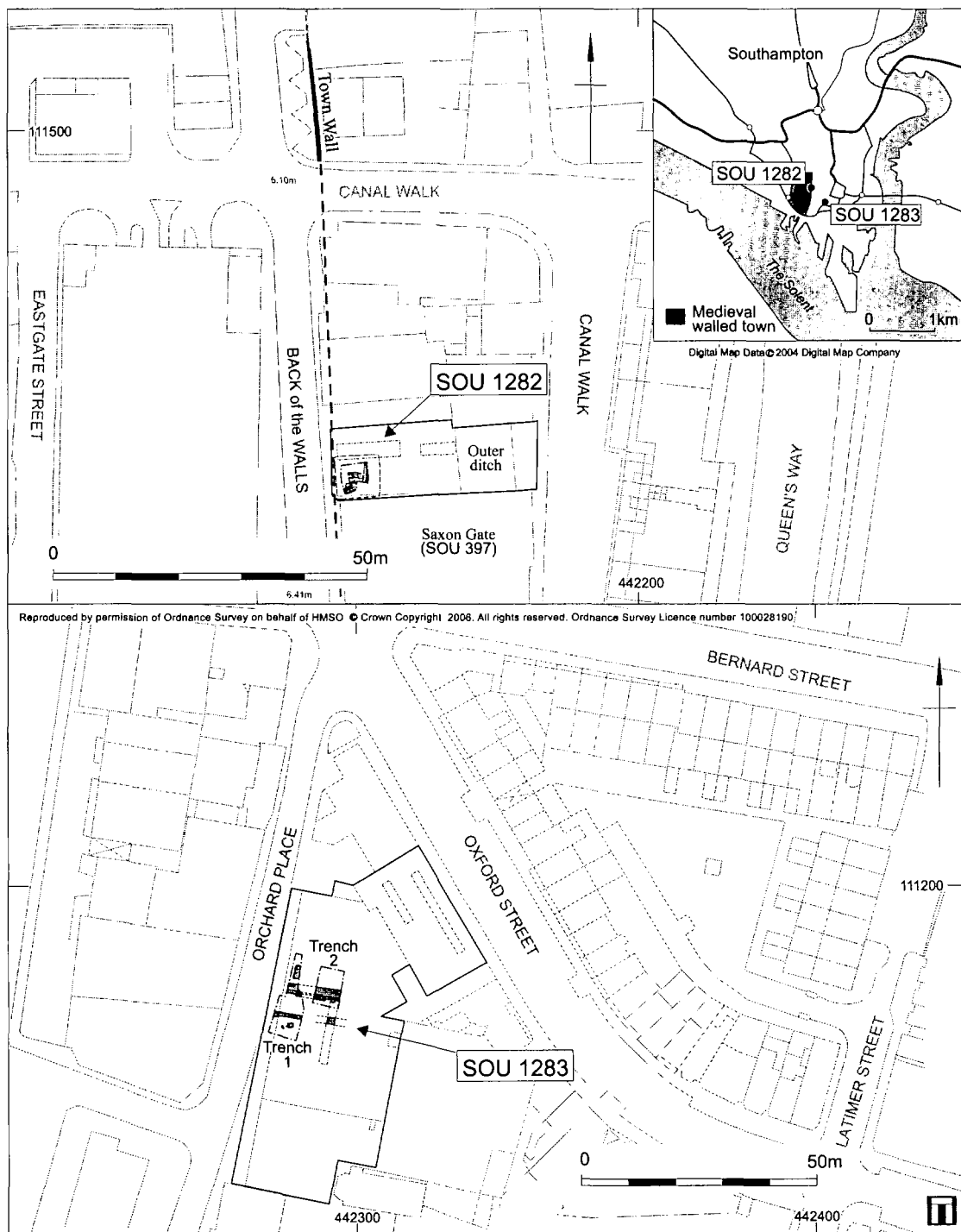
Two small-scale excavations were undertaken by Wessex Archaeology in Southampton in 2004, on land at the Former Car Clinic, Back of the Walls (SOU 1282) and at 62–65 Oxford Street/43–56 Orchard Place (SOU 1283). The excavations followed archaeological evaluations at both sites (Wessex Archaeology 2003a and b), and were carried out in advance of redevelopment. SOU 1282 (NGR 442170 111450) lay immediately to the east of the medieval town wall, and SOU 1283 (NGR 442295 111170) some 300m to the south-east (Fig. 1). This report represents an integrated summary of the excavation results; fuller details can be found in the respective archive reports (Wessex Archaeology 2004a and b). Pottery sherds have been assigned, where appropriate, to fabric types as defined within the Southampton type series (Brown 2002).

The local drift geology comprises brickearth overlying gravels. Both sites lie on relatively flat land, SOU 1282 at an elevation of between 6m and 7m aOD (above Ordnance Datum), and SOU 1283 rather lower at approximately 3–4m aOD. There was extensive 19th and 20th century disturbance at both sites which restricted the areas available for investigation, and the depth

of modern overburden at SOU 1282 (*c.* 2.4m) required the battering of the sides of the excavation trench.

Archaeological background

At SOU 1282 the line of the medieval town wall is known to have extended along the western frontage of the site (Fig. 1), although no upstanding wall now survives in the immediate vicinity, while further east the site straddled the town ditches. An artillery redoubt, added to the town wall and shown on a plan of 1791, may also have lain within the site. A branch of the Southampton and Salisbury canal, built in the late 18th century, reused the outer of the two ditches along the east side of the town, but the canal remained in use for only a short period and was subsequently infilled. Evaluations in 1989 at Saxon Gate (SOU 397), immediately south of SOU 1282, exposed part of a single course of limestone blocks representing the foundations of the medieval town wall, remains of the rampart, and the inner ditch, which was approximately 14.5m wide at this point. Earlier Saxo–Norman structural remains were preserved within the 3m wide berm between the wall and the inner ditch, and also within the narrow strip of land between the inner and outer ditches. These comprised a beam-slot, post-holes and stake-holes, although no coherent building plans could be discerned from the arrangement of features. Perhaps cut by these was a possible ploughsoil containing 10th and 11th century pottery and much animal bone. This, in turn, was sealed by two soil horizons, about 0.3m thick in total, containing mostly 11th and 12th century pottery



but also some 13th century sherds. These layers pre-dated the construction of the town defences (Robey 1990; 2001).

Newton Lane (now Orchard Place), on the west side of SOU 1283 (Fig. 1), was in existence by the 13th century, providing access to a small suburb south-east of the town, and a grant of 1250 named the street *vicus de Niveton*. In the late medieval period SOU 1283 was part of a field forming a portion of God's House land attached to Cockerell's cottage. Recent evaluations and excavations at Lower Canal Walk/Briton Street/Orchard Place (SOU 865, 1265 and 1316), approximately 200m to the south-west of SOU 1283, have revealed a sequence of field boundary ditches and a series of small pits probably dug for brickearth, all of 13th–15th century date. In addition, some demolition rubble may have derived from medieval buildings including a horse-powered mill, the possible remains of which were recorded on SOU 1316. There was also evidence for medieval/post-medieval gardens and orchards (Smith 1998; 2004).

RESULTS

Late Saxon–early medieval (11th–12th century)

The possible late Saxon ploughsoil at SOU 397 was not identified at SOU 1282, and the layers overlying the Saxo-Norman structural remains did not survive in this area. The earliest feature identified at SOU 1282 was pit 12, much disturbed by later pipe trenches and measuring 0.7m at its widest point (Fig. 2). The surviving portion of this sub-rounded feature had steep, stepped sides to a depth of 0.6m, and the fill comprised grey-brown silt with some gravel. This produced several sherds of Early Medieval Flint-tempered ware, including one jar rim, the latter of a late Saxon type which continued in use after the Conquest, probably into the 12th century. One residual sherd of Romano-British pottery was also recovered. Animal

bone included cattle, sheep/goat and pig, some butchered, but there were too few bones to allow any conclusions to be drawn concerning the size/age range of the population, or of animal husbandry practices.

The south edge of pit 12 was cut by feature 16, a possible beam-slot oriented east-west. This was at least 1.70m long, 0.65m wide and 0.3m deep, and within the flat base were three post-holes. Pottery recovered from the fill comprises 11th/12th century Anglo-Norman Mixed Grit Coarsewares and a sherd of Early Medieval Flint-tempered ware. Other sherds of Anglo-Norman Mixed Grit Coarsewares were recovered as residual finds in later features on the site.

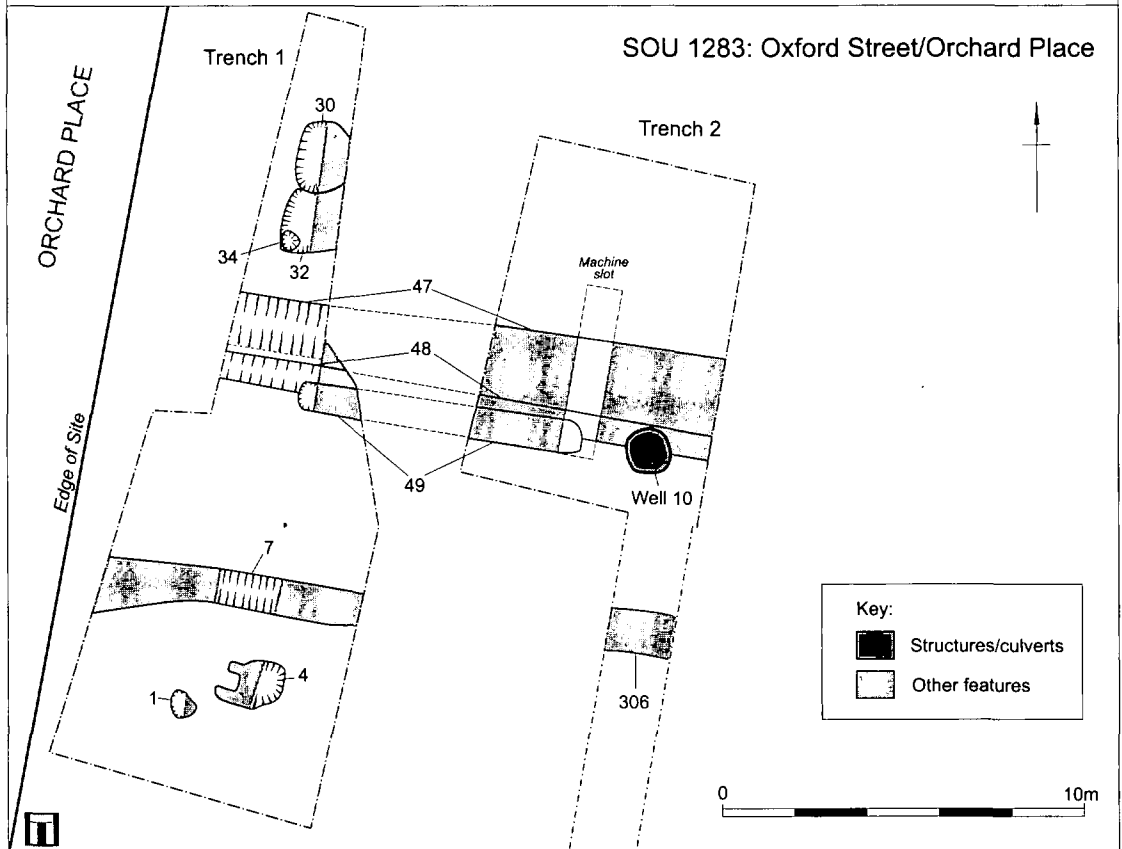
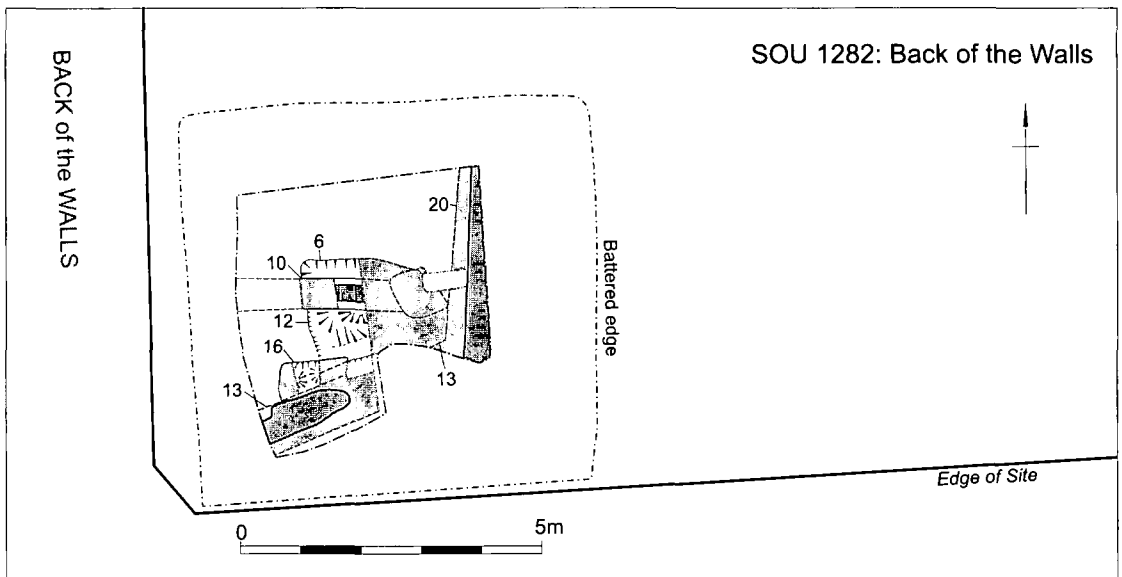
Feature 6, to the north of pit 12, was the heavily disturbed remains of a possible beam slot oriented east-west with a possible terminus at the west end. It was 0.4m wide, survived to a depth of 0.12m, and a single sherd of Early Medieval Flint-tempered ware was recovered from the fill of light grey-brown clay silt.

There were no Saxo-Norman deposits at SOU 1283, where the earliest features have been dated to the 13th–14th centuries, but two residual sherds of Anglo-Norman scratch-marked ware dating to the late 11th/12th century were recovered.

Medieval (13th–15th century)

The landward defences of Southampton were probably completed by the 1220s at the latest, initially comprising a ditch and rampart, with a stone wall added in the 14th century. The outer ditch was also dug in the 14th century, probably sometime between 1322 and 1360 (Platt and Coleman Smith 1975, 147). No features or deposits relating to the wall or ditches were found within the small area excavated at SOU 1282, but the probable extent of the ditches was recorded in the earlier evaluation of the site (Wessex Archaeology 2003a). It is likely that the culvert (20) on the east side of the excavation area (see Fig. 2) follows the western edge of the

Fig. 1 (*opposite*) Location plans of sites, showing evaluation trenches and excavated areas



inner ditch while the wall, set within the earlier rampart, may have been totally destroyed by modern foundations. The existence of the defences provides the explanation for the absence of any other medieval features on this site. Only one sherd of medieval pottery was recovered, a fragment of jar rim in a coarse sandy fabric, probably High Medieval Dorset Quartz-rich Sandy ware, dated to the 13th–early 14th century.

A variety of medieval features was recorded at SOU 1283 (Fig. 2). Ditch 48 was the earliest of two intercutting ditches aligned east–west in the central part of the site. This ditch extended beyond the limits of the excavation, was 0.8m wide and 0.5m deep, had an open U-shaped profile, and appeared to have silted up naturally. Five pottery sherds were recovered from the fill, three of Southampton Coars-ware with a mid-13th to mid-14th century date range, and two residual sherds of Anglo-Norman scratchmarked ware which have been noted above.

The northern edge of ditch 48 was cut by ditch 47, a more substantial feature that was probably its replacement. Ditch 47 was approximately 1.5m wide and 1m deep, with steep sides and a concave base. The lower fill contained small quantities of pottery and ceramic building material (CBM) and occasional fragments of animal bone. The pottery was exclusively local mid-13th to mid-14th century Southampton Sandy ware and the CBM comprised two pieces of coarse, flint-tempered medieval roof tile. The upper ditch fill contained further sherds of Southampton Sandy ware, a single sherd of Local Pink Sandy ware, and a small sherd of Tudor Green ware of late 15th/early 16th century date.

To the south of ditches 47 and 48 was ditch 7/306, measuring 0.7m wide and 0.4m deep with steep sides and a flat base. Ditch 7 was aligned approximately east–west, but meandered slightly. The ditch appears to have silted naturally and several sherds of Southampton Sandy ware with a mid-13th to mid-14th

century date range were recovered from the bottom fill.

Two shallow intercutting pits, 30 and 32, lay to the north of the ditches. The earlier of these flat-bottomed pits, 32, measured 1.5m by at least 1.1m, was 0.3m deep and contained an angled post-hole, 34, in its south-west corner. No dating evidence was recovered, but it was cut by sub-circular pit 30 which measured 1.8m by at least 1.2m and was 0.4m deep. Both pits appear to have silted up naturally, and pit 30 contained a single sherd of medieval glazed and crested ridge tile.

Post-medieval, modern and undated

At SOU 1282 culverts 13 and 20 of probable late 19th century date cut earlier drain 10 containing a ceramic pipe, constructed from short collared sections. At SOU 1283 well 10 was also of probable 19th century date, but post-hole 1, tree-throw 4 and ditch or slot 49 were undated, though the latter post-dated ditch 48.

DISCUSSION

Although restricted in size, the two excavations reported on here provide some useful information concerning the extent of Southampton in the 11th and 12th centuries and subsequent medieval extra-mural land use.

Work at a number of sites has shown that late Saxon occupation spread over a large area of the south-west part of the Southampton peninsula (e.g. Brown 1995, fig. 1). The extent of the later 11th and 12th century settlement is likely to reflect further expansion from a core along a narrow ridge of higher ground now followed by the High Street. At SOU 1282 (Back of the Walls) the discovery of a pit and possibly two beam-slots of likely 11th/12th century date in an area of only *c.* 15m² adds to the more extensive evidence from earlier evaluations to the south at Saxon Gate (SOU 397). At the latter site the sequence appears to

Fig. 2 Plans of SOUs 1282 and 1283, showing archaeological features

indicate a late Saxon agricultural soil and structural remains associated with Saxo-Norman settlement. This settlement extended beyond the later confines of the medieval defences which were constructed on the landward side of Southampton in the early 13th century (Platt and Coleman Smith 1975, 146–7). Virtually nothing can be gleaned about the nature of this settlement from the recent work at SOU 1282, and the available evidence from SOU 397 provides no clear indication of either the layout or the nature of the timber buildings represented by beam-slots and post-holes. All one can safely say from these fragmentary remains is that they probably represent domestic occupation on the eastern edge of the settlement. It is clear, however, that this part of the settlement would have to have been abandoned early in the 13th century when the medieval defences were constructed in this area. These works would have obliterated a broad swathe of buildings along the east side of the settlement and disrupted or severed whole or parts of properties from the newly-enclosed area to the west, as also happened to the north (Platt and Coleman Smith 1975, 20). By this time, wealthy residents had already begun to concentrate in the southern and central parishes, and the northern parishes – St Lawrence's and, particularly, All Saints – gradually became poorer.

The town defences were largely completed in the late 14th century by the addition of a stone wall that encircled the town and strengthened the defences on the east side. It is clear, however, from both archaeological and documentary evidence that much of the work was of poor quality, particularly on the east side (Platt and Coleman Smith 1975, 147). The defences were not maintained and by the early 16th century only the inner of the two ditches remained open, and parts of the wall on the east side were subsequently robbed of stone. The wall foundations, if they survived, would have lain along the extreme western edge of SOU 1282, and the ditches further to the east. The inner ditch remained open into the second half of the 17th century (with fishing rights in the section from the Bargate to God's House Tower recorded in a lease of 1655), though it

is likely that this ditch had been largely infilled by the beginning of the 18th century (Platt and Coleman Smith 1975, 149). The short-lived branch of the Southampton and Salisbury canal which re-used the outer town-ditch was itself largely backfilled by the mid-19th century, and progressively built-over during the later 19th and early 20th centuries.

Much of the early settlement on the east side of the defences, cut-off from the rest of the town during the early 13th century, is likely to have contracted or withered away. East Street survived as an extra-mural focus leading to the suburb along St Mary's Street, but much of the area further to the south, including that to the east of SOU 1282, became mainly gardens and orchards, and remained so throughout the medieval period. However, a small suburb known as Newtown did develop outside the south-eastern corner of the defences, to the east of where the gun battery of God's House Tower was later established in the early 15th century. Newton Lane (now Orchard Place), in existence by the 13th century, provided access and a north–south route through this suburb, extending as far north as East Street. The two principal ditches (47 and 48) at SOU 1283 are likely to reflect a property or field boundary laid out at 90° to Newtown Lane in the 13th century and surviving until at least the late 15th century. The purpose of ditch 7 to the south of this and shallow pits 30 and 32 to the north are unknown, though the pits may have been dug for brickearth extraction. The presence of these various features and the small quantity of associated finds attest to the semi-rural nature of this area to the east of the walled town, evidence for which has also been recorded in other recent investigations. This corresponds with information drawn from documentary sources and cartographic sources which indicate fields, gardens and orchards along with a scatter of buildings.

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