

## The Winchester Excavations; Or, A View From The Trenches

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Winchester, a charming little city of 27,000 "sits like gorgeous icing on top of a rich layer-cake of history."<sup>1</sup> Situated astride the Itchen River in the chalk downs of Hampshire, this ancient city was untouched by the industrial revolution, if not by Oliver Cromwell. Since 1953 Winchester has been undergoing a vast urban redevelopment program. Thanks to the intelligent farsightedness of the local authorities this unprecedented opportunity for simultaneous archaeological investigation into the city's past has not been forfeited. Directed by Martin Biddle, Esq., Lecturer in Mediaeval Archaeology in the University of Exeter, the most ambitious essay in urban archaeology ever attempted in England will continue at least until 1970 as sites become available. All aspects of the city's history from the latest pre-Roman Iron Age (about first century B.C.) down to the emergence of the Victorian city are being investigated. Sites all over the city are yielding information about the public building, private houses, the street plans, the commerce and even, hopefully, the health of the early inhabitants of this royal and ecclesiastical center.

How did Duke and the University of North Carolina get involved in this exciting project? By good luck. In the summer of 1963 Dr. Urban T. Holmes, Kenan Professor of Romance Philology at the University of North Carolina, visited the Winchester excavations and discussed possible American participation with the vigorous young excavations director. Through Dr. Holmes' efforts Duke and U. N. C. set up Winchester Excavations Committees for the selection of 60-odd volunteers for the ten week season in the summer of 1964. Fortunately for most of the applicants, the basic requirements for archaeological spadework are a strong back and common sense, although some persons were chosen for special skills and knowledge. Duke's group consisted of undergraduate and graduate students (not all enrolled at Duke), one physical therapist, one librarian, and two faculty members: Professor Katharine M. Banham, and Professor Louise Hall, liaison officer of the delegation. My stay of one month on the dig was possible only because one member of the Duke group found it necessary to sign up for the first four weeks only, leaving a vacancy for the last several weeks. The American volunteers paid all their own travel expenses but were furnished lodging and subsistence on the dig. The American Council of Learned Societies and the two universities contributed substantial amounts toward excavation costs. These funds, plus generous help from British sources, supported the largest dig ever to take place in England, involving about 185 volunteers at peak period.

American support went primarily to two large sites: the Cathedral Green and Brooks Street. Just north of the 11th century Winchester Cathedral, notable for its uncommonly long nave, groundkeepers rolled up the fresh green turf for use elsewhere, and hardworking young diggers opened trenches to a depth of fourteen feet or more over an area of some 3000 square feet. What they found will cause the rewriting of the history of Saxon architecture. For this summer the foundation trenches have been traced of the two great churches of Anglo-Saxon England. The Old

1. Frank Benier, "The Big Dig," *The Daily Herald* (London), August 29, 1964, p. 6.

Minster, which might be called the Westminster Abbey of the Saxon kingdom, was built in the seventh century by King Cenwalh of Wessex, and enlarged and rebuilt in the tenth century by the Bishop Ethelwold. This magnificent structure, unique in England for its large Westwork, was demolished in 1093-94 by the Normans, who used its stones in the new cathedral which still stands. The New Minster, standing side-by-side and less than three feet to the north of the Old Minster, in places, was established by King Alfred's son Edward the Elder and dedicated in A.D. 903. This monastic center of learning might be compared to St. George's Chapel, Windsor, for here were buried Alfred, Edward the Elder, and other important late Saxons. Under Bishop Ethelwold's inspiration the scriptoria of the two Minsters played a major part in the great outpouring of manuscript illumination known as the Winchester School. Perhaps the site of St. Swithun's grave will be discovered as the Westwork is excavated in future summers.

Lower Brook Street, the second site sponsored and manned chiefly by Americans, lies to the north of the Cathedral near the River Itchen. The high water level in this area has served archaeology well in two ways. The dampness has prevented the digging of basements which would have destroyed earlier foundations, and it has preserved mediaeval timbers *in situ*. This vast area of 29 acres, now being cleared of slum housing, presents a laboratory for tracing the development of a busy mediaeval street which was occupied continuously from the first quarter of the 10th century. A wealth of mediaeval leases in the city archives identify craftsmen and shopkeepers in this commercial quarter of the city. Mediaeval cess pits are providing material for a new science—paleomicrobiology—in which the isolation of strains of bacteria and viruses may inform us of the true nature of early epidemics. There was much joshing of diggers on "The Brooks" about importing the Black Plague into North Carolina.

Southeast of the Cathedral lies Wolvesey Palace, where the ruined walls recall its twelfth-century builder, Bishop Henry de Blois. On this third major site, excavations have disclosed beneath the Palace foundations an earlier building possibly related to a Saxon bishop's palace. Still deeper lie a Roman street and Roman house foundations. Wolvesey will be opened to the public as a national monument under the Ministry of Public Building and Works when excavations have been completed.

Other sites available this summer were Tower Street, where a large Iron Age hut and Iron Age pottery were found, as well as evidence for the sequence and dating of the Roman defenses; and the Assize Courts, important for the succession of five streets (one on top of the other) which help to clarify street plans from Roman through mediaeval times. Both these sites and three emergency digs will soon be covered by new buildings, as will "The Brooks."

The Winchester Excavations workers were quartered at Bushfield, a British Army camp of pre-World War II vintage set on a hill three miles south of the city. A British army unit had recently vacated Bushfield, dismantling much of the equipment which the local arrangements committee had expected to be available for use through the summer. Although American diggers found the accommodations somewhat primitive, our British comrades rated the Winchester dig as plush. Frequently, volunteer diggers furnish their own lodging and food and receive no compensation whatever. "Roughing it" seems to be part of the archaeological tradition in England, where most digs operate on a shoestring.

Our workday began at 8 a.m. when our jeans-and-shorts-clad crew boarded a double-decker bus for the ride into town. By 8:30 wheelbarrows, buckets, picks, brushes and other impedimenta had been trundled from storage sheds to the various sites and the day's labor began. Work continued until 6 p.m. except for one hour for lunch and short morning and afternoon breaks. About 6:15 the weary crew again boarded the bus for the ride back to camp. We worked six days a week, and work on the seventh day was not discouraged. Back at Bushfield the diggers scrambled for priority in line outside limited bathing facilities, and woe to the last in line—no hot water. After supper some students (those on "rota") helped to clean camp and peel potatoes, our staple food item. After a long day of hard physical labor the young still had energy to burn. Some headed for the parade ground for a game of cricket, some climbed neighboring St. Catherine's Hill (site of an Iron Age fort), and some headed for "The Bell" pub for songs and revels. The less hardy among us watched the "telly" in the commons room, did chores, or just fell into our sagging cots.

Cosmopolitan is the word for the summer's Winchester crew. Visiting diggers from France, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands drifted in and out



*Winchester Excavations, Cathedral Greens, August, 1964. l. to r.: B. Rosalind E. Dunnett, Director of Excavation, Colchester, England; Nancy Capps, currently enrolled in School of Library Science, U. N. C. at Chapel Hill; E. Ann Smith, recipient of Honors Masters Award for 1964-65 in English, Duke Univ. Graduate School; Martin Biddle, lecturer in Mediaeval Archeology, Univ. Exeter, Devon.*

of camp all through the summer. Archaeological digging is "in" as a way to vacation, and students move from dig to dig through the summer, staying a week or two, sometimes more, at one place. Some British students begin digging at the age of ten, are old hands at 17, and have become site supervisors at the advanced age of 19 or 20. Most of the site supervisors at Winchester were university students of archaeology. One young supervisor on the Cathedral Green was awarded her degree from Cardiff in mid-summer and left us to become Director of Excavations at the Roman town of Colchester. Perhaps youthfulness accounts for the lack of formality on the sites. The use of surnames, even in addressing the Director, was practically unknown.

Working beside English teen-agers in the trenches at Wolvesey made me sharply aware of a serious strain beneath the constant banter. My ears soon became accustomed to the sound of picks thudding to the time of "We Shall Overcome" and "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" In their passion for pop folksingers such as Pete Seeger and Bob Dylan these youngsters betrayed their concern for social justice and world peace. The English people's memory of World War II is strong (one Southampton lad commented, "My grandmother died under the stairs in an air raid") and the CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) counts teenagers among its committed members.

What do archaeological volunteers do? Mostly they dig . . . with pick-axe, hand-pick, spade and trowel. Neophytes usually swing pick-axes, tote buckets and push wheelbarrows to the damp pile. This kind of work is never finished, but as they learn necessary techniques, some diggers are assigned to finer trowelling and scraping jobs, and to such specialized tasks as "drawing sections," that is, measuring and plotting on graph paper the color and texture of layers in the earthen trench walls. By mid-summer the American students were drawing sections and excavating with delicate brushes and instruments such crucial areas as the unique bell foundry beneath the Old Minster. Those with a knowledge of anatomy were excavating, measuring and drawing *in situ* fragile skeletons a thousand years old. After a few days on the site even the green digger speaks of taking down a balk, straightening a section, robber trenches and modern intrusions as casually as the librarian refers to CBI, NUC and the LC cat.

While the diggers man the front lines, or at least the trenches, of any archaeological expedition, the supporting corps is of first importance. Outside the trenches worked the photographers; the survey and drawing team (Dr. Hall and Professor W. P. Brandon of Lenoir Rhyne College); experts in anatomy (Dean George R. Holcomb of U.N.C.) and dendrochronology (Professor A. C. Barefoot of State College); and the pottery shed staffs (including Dr. Banham and Mrs. W. P. Brandon). Back at Bushfield the Herculean task of running the camp was accomplished by Professor John M. Schnorrenberg (leader of the U.N.C. delegation) and Mrs. Schnorrenberg in cooperation with Miss Charmian Gooch.

Into the pottery sheds were brought all the small "finds" from each site at the end of the day. Dr. Banham, assistant supervisor of the Wolvesey shed, estimates that in the first seven weeks she and Mrs. Brandon (with occasional help) categorized, washed, brushed with a toothbrush, labelled, marked, bagged and boxed some 9000 fragments of mediaeval glass, another 9000 fragments or sherds of coarse Roman and mediaeval pottery and many more pieces of glass bottles, tiles, Roman mosaic tessera, metal fragments and bones. At Brook Street and on the Cathedral Green many times this amount

was processed. Few persons had the good fortune to turn up newsworthy items such as the two heavily gilt, chip-carved Saxon silver belt or harness plates, one of which was pictured in the *Times* of August 4. There were other valuable finds such as early silver coins, an amethyst pendant and a fine carnelian intaglio. When a bulldozer working on a road just outside Winchester turned up two Roman burials late one afternoon, an emergency crew worked all night removing such fine pieces as a beautiful blue glass flagon and a bronze ewer. Next morning the bulldozer resumed.

By summer's end the American contingent was feeling nostalgic about Winchester even before leaving it. So warmly cordial were the citizens of the city that we came to refer to Winchester, and even to the Cathedral, as "ours". Shopkeepers took the mad Americans in stride, seldom failing to ask, as we made noontime purchase, "And what have you found today?" Mr. and Mrs. Farmer, owners of the tiny Caprice Cafe just off the Green, became so attached to their lunch and break-time patrons that in the last week of the dig they passed around an autograph book to collect names and addresses. Official Winchester was no less friendly. The Dean of the Cathedral personally invited the diggers on the Green to come inside for Evensong just as they were, be-jeaned and be-grimed. Some did go. On our last evening in Winchester, the senior members of the Excavations party and members of the local Excavations Committee were entertained at dinner by the Mayor and Mayoress of Winchester. Happily, Dr. and Mrs. Urban T. Holmes were present for this gala climax to the summer's work.

Our callouses have worn away now, and "troweler's cramp" no longer paralyzes the hand, but veterans of Winchester '64 will long gather to reminisce and listen to tapes of the "Ashley Terrace Five" singing their spontaneous worksongs, and to Duke's Marjorie Randolph, folk-singer and pick-axer *par excellence*.

Have trowel, will travel!

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## Mrs. Elizabeth Hughey to Leave N. C. State Library

Mrs. Hughey, one of NCLA's former presidents, has resigned as Librarian of North Carolina State Library, effective March 1st. She will join the Library Services Branch of the U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare in Washington as library extension specialist. Her husband, A. Miles Hughey, is an information specialist with the U. S. Department of Education.

Librarian of the State Library since 1956 when the State Library and the State Library Commission were merged, Mrs. Hughey has given almost thirty years of library service to North Carolina. The first regional library in this state for Beaufort, Hyde and Martin counties was organized by Mrs. Hughey. She became supervisor of rural libraries for the State Library Commission in 1946 and director of the Commission in 1950.

Her activities in professional library associations have been numerous, and she will be sadly missed by her many friends and associates in our state.