

## Lecture Report - Gründungsviertel excavations, Lübeck, Germany

Dr Dirk Rieger of Bereich Archäologie Lübeck gave a splendid lecture, in almost faultless English, to the Society on Saturday 14th January. His subject was the five-year long excavation recently completed at the Gründungsviertel, or 'Foundation Quarter', of the hanseatic city of Lübeck. The work extended over 12,000 square metres of the city, downhill from the principal parish church, the Marienkirche.

Lübeck, a World Heritage site since 1987, was firebombed in 1942 causing widespread destruction of the medieval historic centre. Rebuilt in the 1950s, the post-war structures are now being replaced with modern buildings designed to follow the footprints of their medieval predecessors. In this way, contemporary architecture will help to retain the 'sense and spirit of place' of the ancient city. The archaeological excavations, costing some €12 million, were undertaken in advance of rebuilding.

The astonishing discoveries, in deposits often over five metres in depth and waterlogged, included some 162 12th-century timber buildings, 90 13th-century and later brick buildings, more than 100 cess pits (earth-, wooden- and brick-lined), 20 wells, four streets, and hundreds of thousands of artefacts. The results uncovered evidence for Slavonic activity, the earliest phases of the 12th-century German town, and much from the high medieval commercial period when Lübeck was the 'Queen of the Hanse'.

The quality of preservation was frequently remarkable. One timber cellar was found with its ceiling beams collapsed on to the floor; the beams could be dated by dendrochronology to 1166. Another wooden cellar of c.1175 stood almost to full height with the lintel of its door intact and in place, access being provided by a brick staircase. A timber 'Toilettenhaus' or latrine shed was found with side-by-side lavatory seats, one of which had a small step in front of it, rare evidence (apart from toys) for children in the archaeological record.

Portable objects included a wooden birdcage dated to around 1250, styli, slates for accounts, chests, and seals of merchants as well as a pair of spectacles, cloth seals and shears, whetstones, herring barrels, shoes, purses, and even a mirror.

The excavation, which was directed by Dirk, is currently being written up. He aims to complete the report by the end of this year, a fine example of prompt assessment and synthesis. The report will have great value in Britain as well as Germany, long historic links between the two countries being frequently visible in the archaeological record. Questions after the lecture showed that the audience had not only thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon but had been astonished at the quality of the discoveries.

Brian Ayers

