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WOOD QUAY
Dilemma

A NEW LEAF

The D.O.E
Experiment

Harcourt Tce
Decision



Editorial

WOOD QUAY

At the time of writing, An Taisce is cautiously optimistic that a satisfactory solution will be found to the Wood Quay issue in Dublin. The problem, quite simply, is that building is due to start on the 4 acre Civic Offices site even though portion of this unique area has not been adequately excavated. Archaeologists have good reason to believe that the unexcavated portion is potentially very rich in finds and information and An Taisce, along with other interested bodies, has strongly urged that the area should be fully and scientifically excavated before it is finally built over.

It has been acknowledged that this work could take place without any undue delay to the development, by simply re-arranging the building programme. The Minister for Education, as an impartial and responsible figure, has the necessary authority to request that this be done. It would be a great pity if many lessons were not learned from the Wood Quay affair. A similar situation could easily arise again in the not too distant future, if more development is proposed for the medieval part of Dublin. It is understood that the National Museum, which had been excavating on the Wood Quay site, is seriously short of funds and personnel; indeed, it is not their primary function to excavate. It should be remembered that there are other bodies besides the Museum which are in a position to give expertise and advice on archaeological sites and digs. The Planning Departments of Local Authorities constantly consult the National Monuments Advisory Council, and many people are now asking why Dublin Corporation did not do this in relation to Wood Quay. There is also the National Committee for Archaeology of the Royal Irish Academy.

Clearly, the procedures and implications for excavating a large urban archaeological site have not been properly worked out. For instance, funding is one problem. Who should actually undertake the work, how is provision to be made for the publication of excavators' findings, and how much time is to be allotted to the job?

Quite clearly legislators and administrators should give this matter adequate consideration, so that we shall not be faced with another controversy every time a part of our medieval heritage is to be built over.

The editorial reflects the views of the Executive Committee of An Taisce.

Publication Arrangements

This is the last issue of *An Taisce Journal* for 1977. In future the journal will appear in the middle of January, March, May, July, September and November.

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Cover Picture:

Poised above the excavations at Wood Quay, a mechanical digger waits while the controversy rages. Photo Irish Times.



VIEWPOINT

Once again the Dublin Wood Quay/Civic Offices site is in the news, and once again, there is discord. In many ways the present situation is very similar to that on the site in 1974/75 and members of An Taisce will remember the full coverage given to the issues then in *Life and Environment*, for October 1974 and May 1975 in particular. The present article is an attempt to bring the story up-to-date and explain to the non-archaeologist just why there is another crisis; and to offer some suggestions which may help to prevent the same trouble arising in the future on every development site in Central Dublin.

Archaeological Excavation of a modern kind first took place in the city of Dublin in 1961/62 when the reconstruction of the crossblock at Dublin Castle led to the discovery of Viking remains in the city for the first time. The dig was carried out by the Office of Public Works and to date no report has been published, a sad precedent.

The proposed widening of High Street posed a threat to the underground remains beside the Tailor's Hall, and a lengthy series of excavations was carried out there by the National Museum from 1962-72 which were given considerable publicity by the excavator, Mr. Brendan Ó Riordáin, who has more recently examined a further area in Christ Church Place (1972-75).

The results of the excavations were beyond all expectations, and caused an immense interest in early Dublin amongst archaeologists and historians throughout Europe. For citizens and tourists, however, the sites remained closed off behind high fences and were never seen or explained and hence were very little understood.

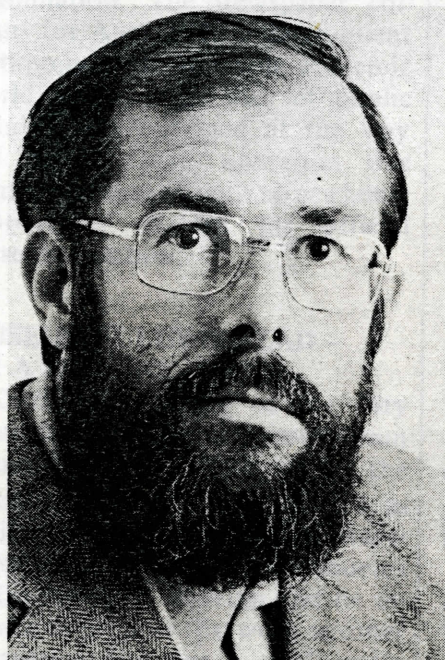
In 1969, preliminary clearance work on the vast 4-acre Wood Quay site began in preparation for the construction of the Corporation's long-planned Civic Office complex. The Museum was invited to excavate areas of interest and spent three rewarding years (1969/1971) excavating a relatively small area off Winetavern Street, just below Christ Church, which it appears is not threatened by the construction of the office blocks at all.

At this time all the talk was of excavating Viking Dublin, and certainly the pre-Norman levels, in the city, of the 10th to 12th centuries, are of undoubted interest and importance.

What's wrong at WOOD QUAY?

The future of the Wood Quay excavation is one of the most important issues being discussed at the present time. *An Taisce Journal* asked RICHARD HOWARTH, Geography Librarian, T.C.D. to contribute extended article for the Viewpoint column.

Richard Howarth



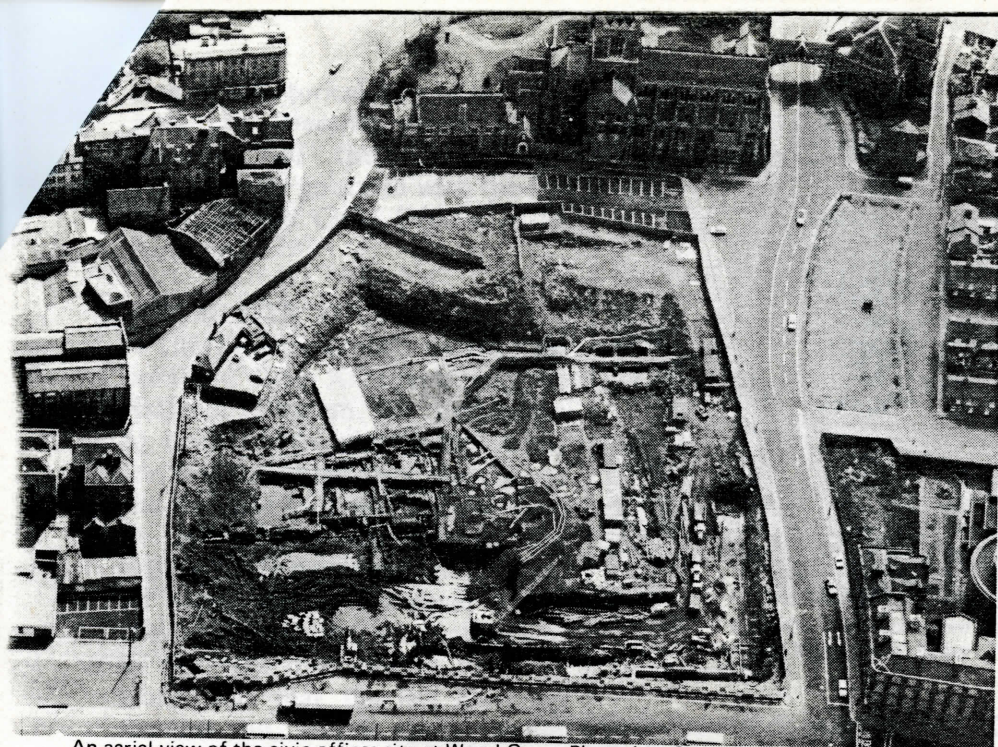
Norman Dublin, by contrast of at least equal importance in the city's history, and represented by even more copious remains underground, was not widely talked of or appreciated. This reflects a similar blind spot in the archaeological programmes of many of the official bodies within the country, and so it was not entirely surprising to find that when the Museum was tackling the Civic Offices site as a whole it had designated the area between the newly discovered city wall crossing the site and the river, an area not "of prime archaeological importance" and so archaeologically expendable.

The realisation of this was slow to come as no unprovoked public statements have ever been made by the authorities about their Dublin excavation policy. The discovery that the area "outside the city wall" was not to be excavated, but to be cleared by machine unexamined, set off a public outcry, represented by the public meeting called in the Mansion House by the Living City Group in March, 1974.

As a result an enormous programme of work, using hitherto unprecedented numbers of workmen, began on the Norman, reclaimed area of Wood Quay outside the early city wall. Its success was striking, with the uncovering of sections of timber quays and river walls used to front the river in the 13th Century and remarkable quantities of ships timbers of the period, to name only the most important discoveries.

This work would never have begun if public pressure had not been exerted, and our knowledge of the development of the Dublin waterfront would have gone for good.

An important lesson was learned



An aerial view of the civic offices site at Wood Quay. Photo Leo Swan.

at this time by those concerned for the proper conduct of excavations: that if a reasonable statement of the position was put before the public and indeed before the elected Members of Dublin Corporation there would be strong support for the best archaeological treatment of the site, and that money would be forthcoming to finance such excavation as was considered necessary.

Shortage of money has never dictated the destruction of the city's archaeological heritage, but only lack of information, or misinformation, which has allowed it to go by default. If, therefore, the Corporation was making decisions which threatened the destruction of valuable material – and it is still true that a greater volume of archaeologically significant material has been removed by machine, unrecorded, than has ever been properly excavated from the Civic Offices site – then the source of their information was likely to be at fault, rather than their own heads and hearts.

THE 3-PHASE PLAN

Later in 1974, when excavations had been under way on the lower part of Wood Quay for some months, public concern was expressed that there would be insufficient time for the Museum to complete the work to the agreed time schedule. This was reinforced in May 1975 when it became known that the Museum had agreed with the architects to vacate one third of the site by April

12, 1975, and the remaining two-thirds after a further one and two years respectively.

It was pointed out that vast areas remained unexcavated with only a few weeks to go, and that if an extension was not requested the layers would be removed by machine. In the face of mounting public dismay, it was denied that extra time was needed until the expiry of the time limit and only then was it agreed that a six-week extension be granted as a sop to public opinion, the time being quite inadequate to excavate the remaining area.

And indeed it soon became clear that site clearance was proceeding on unexamined areas of the site, and medieval quay walls were removed without any archaeological examination. The newspaper columns for April 1975 bear eloquent testimony that the whole academic world and a large slice of public opinion was outraged at the way the Wood Quay operation was being mismanaged, with no academic support at all for the official Museum position.

MUSEUM FULLY SPREAD – OR A ROUTINE JOB?

During a meeting of the City Council, under severe pressure from Councillors, Dr. Raftery of the National Museum, was quoted as saying that “the Wood Quay excavations were stretching the resources of the National Museum and he intended to propose that work on other excavation sites, such as Knowth,

be suspended and work concentrated on Wood Quay”. (Irish Independent 26/4/75.) “We have tried repeatedly. . . to enlist more expert help . . . but all the Universities seem to be too busy on their own projects and digging their own sites. Site workers are more readily available, but we can't afford to pay them. And who is to direct the work? I am fully spread – I have only one assistant” (Irish Times 26/4/77.)

This admission, made at a moment of extreme pressure, and never repeated so far as I know, contains in fact the key to the whole calamitous debacle of the Wood Quay excavations, but not in quite the way the speaker intended. It contrasts strangely with Dr. Raftery's recent statement that “in spite of everything which had been said about the fine medieval remains which were said to be contained in the Wood Quay site, the Museum looked on it as a routine job”. (Irish Independent 12/9/77.)

The “six week” extension soon became an “open-ended” one, thereby strongly supporting the views of the protesters that the previously agreed time-scale had been quite inadequate. Archaeological excavation in fact continued on the Wood Quay site, both within and without the wall, for almost a further year, until July 1976 beyond the end of the Museum's previously agreed time limit for area two of the site.

Some weeks earlier the Corporation had announced that, due to financial difficulty, they would not be able to go ahead with site work in the immediate future (Irish Times 26/5/76). This would appear to have given the National Museum a perfect opportunity to work away in peace, without the pressure of deadlines, to clear the remaining areas along Fishamble Street which would be needed for Civic Offices. But the reaction was quite different, to pay off all the staff and close down the excavations which have in fact never resumed. Thus, for the last 15 months the site has lain idle, with neither archaeologist nor developer turning the soil, and the present luxuriant undergrowth has become a haven for wildlife.

This was the position until July of this year when the Friends of Medieval Dublin, an academic study group then involved in the produc-

tion of a historical map of the Medieval city, became aware of the intention of the Corporation's architects to go ahead with the first stage of the Civic Offices in the Autumn.

PUBLIC SITE TOURS

The Friends applied to the Corporation, their Architects and the National Museum for permission to open up the site to the public for tours at week-ends throughout the summer as it was realised that, in spite of repeated requests, the ordinary rate payer and schoolchild, let alone visitor had never had a chance to visit any excavation site in the city over the 15 years of work, and that the last surviving remains on Wood Quay would soon be levelled before building work at last began.

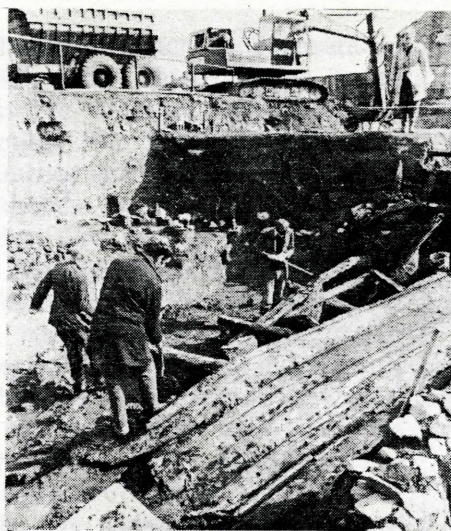
Soon after the tours began, it was learned that the intention was that the building work was to commence not, as had previously been understood, on the already cleared portion of the site along Wood Quay but with the upper section of the site off Fishamble Street including the now contentious strip along the street which had never been excavated. One half of the strip was in fact still occupied until a few months previously by the turncock's office of the City Water Works Department, and is the only part of the site still complete to street level, tarmac intact and undisturbed.

ST. OLAVE'S CHURCH

The Museum staff expressed themselves amazed to hear of the change of building plans and it was pointed out to them that the turncock's office was the probable site of the remains of St. Olave's church, a Scandinavian foundation of the 11th century, the only church of the Norsemen in Dublin which would ever be available for investigation, and a parish church of the city for five centuries.

The adjacent strip of unexcavated ground is all that remains of a deep layer formerly extending across the site, most of which was removed wholesale by the contractors machinery in 1975.

Scandinavian-type houses of stakes and wattle-work are exposed on the top surface, and are visible in the side section, showing that



A section of a wooden boat discovered during excavation work at Wood Quay. Photo: Tom Lawlor, Irish Times.

they extend downwards for 12/15 ft., the greatest depth of pre-Norman deposits yet located in the City. This makes the excavation of this section from top to bottom a matter of importance.

To sum up then, the position is as follows: the Wood Quay site, covering 4 acres of the walled medieval city, is probably the largest area of that city which will ever be available at one time — it is an exceptional site. Its position along the waterfront, occupying perhaps half of the total medieval waterfront and dock area, is also unlikely to be matched again in excavation.

It contains within it the probable site of the only Dublin Church built by the Vikings/ (except the earlier Christ Church which is either inaccessible or else completely destroyed). The fragment of the site which still demands excavation covers approx. 80 yds x 20 yds, not an enormous task when it is compared with the size of areas which have already been tackled.

The Dublin Corporation have repeatedly said over the past few years, and repeated as recently as August of this year, that the site is available to the archaeologists of the National Museum for excavation if they so wish, but the official reply of the Museum, sent to the Corporation over a year ago, is that they had completed work and were finally vacating the site. How can this be explained?

CHANGE OF PLAN

One explanation is that there appears to have been a change of plan on the part of the Corporation

or their architects, as to the order in which the buildings on the site were to be erected. Formerly, it appeared that the first buildings would be put up along the Wood Quay front, and this is supported by several facts: The 3-year timetable agreed between the Museum and the Corporation allowed least time for the investigation of what was called area one, along Wood Quay, outside the newly discovered wall and the excavators were (unofficially) subjected to some pressure to vacate that site; by contrast the upper site within the wall, where the blocks are now to be built, was still partly occupied by the Waterworks Office till a few months ago; the lower site has been dug out and is prepared for building to go ahead, whereas the upper site is the least prepared; and finally the upper site, including the waterworks yard area, was formerly fenced off from the remainder of the site, and may not have been understood to have been included in the site on which the Museum considered it had completed its excavations. Some confirmation of this is to be found in a statement made at the time that work ceased in 1976: "The National Museum has ended its excavation programme at the mediaeval site at Wood Quay . . . The Keeper of the Irish Antiquities at the National Museum, Dr. Joseph Raftery, said yesterday that the Museum would be keeping a close watch on the site, and further examination of a site near Fishamble Street might be possible later." (Irish Times 14/7/76).

MUSEUM'S EXCLUSIVE CONTROL

The other factor is the way in which the excavations have been conducted by the National Museum over the years since they began work in the city, in comparison with the way in which such affairs are handled elsewhere in Europe.

First of all, the Museum has maintained exclusive control over the excavations, no other archaeologists but those employed by the Museum have worked on any of the sites, except students and others casually employed. There has been no controlling or even advisory Committee with non-Museum representatives; in fact, the excavations have been run as an internal Museum

affair as a "routine job." in fact.

When it is remembered that the Museum has been chronically short of staff of all kinds for many, many years, as frequent reports have testified, it is curious that they should have assumed the full weight of the unprecedentedly large Dublin City excavations without making some real effort to spread the load.

At times during 1974-6, the Wood Quay dig must have occupied more staff, involved more expenditure, produced more finds needing attention, registration and storage, than all the rest of the Museum's routine duties through the whole country put together.

OVERWHELMING EXPERIENCE

For an already overstretched institution, short of money, space and manpower, this must have been an almost overwhelming experience, and it is easy to believe that many routine and even essential matters had to be shelved temporarily and then in practice, until the end of the Wood Quay dig, when there would be someone with the time to attend to them. There must, in other words, have been strong internal pressure on the Museum staff, which they would all have understood, to curtail the Dublin excavations so that an increasing backlog of other work could be attended to.

Hence the consistent *under*-estimation of work to be done, and of time necessary to complete it, which has been chronicled above and which has been evident to any one following the course of the City excavations.

All this would at once become clear to an advisory Committee, if one were set up, and it would become clear too that the National Museum, as at present constituted, is quite unable to deal unaided with the Dublin City Excavations, which require a permanent staff of some kind, with the freedom to call in assistance from all sources when required. Whether from short-sightedness or reliance on restrictive Civil Service procedures, the National Museum appears unwilling to co-operate with other scholars, or institutions and there is little alternative, at this late stage, to insisting that they be obliged to give up their jealously-guarded

exclusive contract to excavate in Dublin for which there is no basis in law or archaeological practice. The roll of missed opportunities and squandered evidence is already far too long, and includes: the fate of Fyan's Castle and many other structures destroyed unexamined on Wood Quay over the last 5 years; the failure to conserve adequately the magnificent timber and other structures uncovered on the Dublin sites since the work began; the inadequacy of scientific methods of treatment of finds; the apparent total disregard of the historical evidence for the sites which have been excavated, which have included some of the most fully documented pieces of ground, from medieval to modern times, to be found in Ireland; the exclusion of the ordinary people of Dublin, and other interested visitors from the sites of the excavations from the beginning, so that only within the last few months, over a year after work ceased, have any number of people been able to get any appreciation of what has been found; the almost complete absence of any substantial printed account of any of the excavations undertaken to date, and the very real fear that, under present conditions, none ever will appear; and lastly and most importantly, the complete failure to attempt any degree of forward planning to deal with the inevitable development threats (or excavation opportunities) which will crop up in the old city area with increasing frequency for the rest of the century. Unless this vital matter is regulated in some

Excavators uncover wattle screens of medieval houses at Wood Quay. Photo Tom Lawlor Irish Times



way in the near future we will see one destructive fiasco after another, as emergency or "rescue" procedures are quite inadequate to deal with the deep, complex stratigraphy now known to cover the whole walled city area.

MUST RESUME WORK

If all this seems unsatisfactory, what then is the remedy? In the short term, to deal with the present threat of destruction on Fishamble Street, there seems little alternative to putting pressure on the Museum to return and resume work on the site they abandoned in June 1976, and to seek every assistance to enable them to complete the work as thoroughly and speedily as possible. It should be emphasized that nothing in this article is intended to reflect on the actual excavations carried out under the direction of the professional staff of the National Museum. It is the organisation and direction of the work which have been so inadequate, leading inevitably to such notable losses of knowledge, and which need to be radically revised to bring the whole project up to an acceptable standard.

In the longer term, however, the whole organisation of the Dublin City excavations needs to be put on a sound basis, so that future building and development plans can be regulated in accordance with the archaeological potential, and so that future excavation, where necessary, can be carried out to the highest standards, and the resulting material processed and published within a reasonable length of time.

To see what type of organisation is likely to be most suitable to direct the Dublin excavations we need to consider local conditions, but the experience of other cities with similar problems such as York, London, Lincoln, Trondheim, will be of great assistance.

EXCAVATION COMMITTEE

For Dublin, I would propose a City of Dublin Excavation Committee (or Trust), which would be a body with the widest possible representation, both of archaeological and other academic interests, (National Museum, Office of Public Works, Royal Irish Academy, University lecturers or equivalent in

archaeology, medieval history, soil science, palaeoecology, conservation etc.), voluntary bodies, (Old Dublin Society, An Taisce, Dublin Civic Group, etc.), Residents Associations, Architects, Engineers, Planners, public representatives, fund raising interests etc. This general committee would ensure public and specialist interest and participation in the planning and execution of the work, the absolute reverse of the present secretive procedures where no one but the favoured few knows or is able to find out what is actually happening.

The Excavation Committee would no doubt have several sub-committees dealing with excavation, research, publication, fund-raising, publicity and so on, and would employ a Director, a full-time salaried professional, probably a medieval archaeologist, who would most conveniently be on the payroll of the Corporation.

He would need a small permanent staff, which would be linked closely with the existing institutions in Dublin, and would probably expand into areas where they were deficient. For example, as there is no archaeological laboratory in the state with trained staff, it might be convenient to establish one to deal with the enormous mass of Dublin City finds, which could then take work on contract from other organisations which would need its services, or it might be possible to persuade some established body such as the Board of Works or the Museum to set up such a laboratory, and contribute to its expenses. The key note would be co-ordination of all available resources, but to use the overwhelming size and urgency of the Dublin excavations to get advances where they are most needed.

Again, in the sadly neglected historical field, one or more research projects would be identified and students or full time staff found to carry them out; foremost would be the complete investigation and analysis, and eventually publication, of all the many surviving medieval documents referring to the City, from which detailed maps of the streets, lanes, houses and shops of the city, and their occupants, could be built up, an essential tool in the planning and interpretation of city excavation. The work done in Oxford and Winchester, for in-



Mark Clinton, archeologist, working on the floor of a wooden house, uncovered during the excavation at Wood Quay. Photo: Tom Lawlor. Irish Times.

stance, shows what is possible in this field and the stimulus this demand for information would give to medieval studies in Ireland would be invaluable.

PUBLICATION

A final word must be said about publication. So far, as has been mentioned above, the record for the Dublin excavations is very bad. A handful of short articles have appeared, largely on Viking Dublin, but there is no substantial publication on any aspects of the last 15 years' work, nor even a full series of interim annual reports to give a skeleton account of what has been going on.

This is partly a facet of the general shortage of time and staff and partly a reflection of what is either a neglect of fundamental public relations or a disregard for the principle of public accountability, as you please. But it is also a violation of professional ethics, and may indicate a much more important deficiency in the present organisation of the work. Are there any serious plans to publish the Dublin excavations at

all? If there are, they have not yet been revealed and it is common knowledge that the two directors of the Dublin excavations have now other full-time jobs within the Museum, one as keeper of the new Folk-Life division, the other as Education Officer.

It is an old rule of thumb in archaeology that the writing up of an excavation for publication requires at least as much time and man-power as did the actual digging in the field. This is recognised in York, for example by having a number of permanently employed site archaeologists working under the Director, each of whom directs a particular site throughout, then stops digging until his report on that site is written up and submitted for publication. In this way no fifteen year backlog is allowed to develop, which must in the end become impossible to clear.

If the excavators of Medieval Dublin are not going to be given the time to write up and publish their work the system under which they work is indefensible, and must be changed. ●

What we said

On the 9th September, An Taisce made a statement about the Civic Offices site which was sent to the Taoiseach, Government Ministers, Leaders of the Opposition, City Councillors and to the Press.

In it, An Taisce pointed out that it had been concerned about the proper development of the Wood Quay site since December 1968 in relation to the proposed plans for the Civic Offices and since November 1973 in relation to the excavations.

When the Museum first withdrew from the site in the Autumn of 1973, An Taisce did all within its power to point out to the public, the Corporation and the Museum that the site had not, according to professional advice available to the

Trust, been adequately excavated. Further excavation of the site subsequently disclosed finds of such significance that in June 1975 eminent British archaeologists urged the then Taoiseach, Mr. Cosgrave, by telegram that "this excavation is of European importance yielding results unparalleled elsewhere."

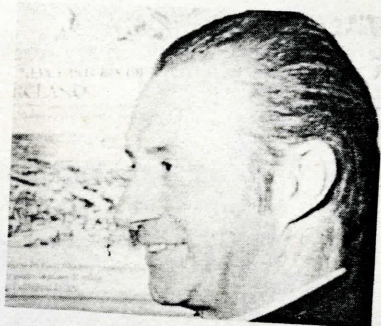
The whole issue has again come to public attention with the announcement that building is due to begin immediately, not on the cleared areas of the site as had been expected but on the south-eastern part of the site, south of the city wall. This has only been partly excavated and is, according to prominent archaeologists, potentially the richest in finds and information. This is substantiated by the discovery of a Viking embankment on the corner of the site which has been partly investigated.

The statement then quoted Mr. Peter Addyman, Director of the York Archaeological Trust, who has been excavating medieval remains very similar to those at Wood Quay, "there is no belittling the importance of this site and there are not going to be two medieval Dublins for study: it is type site for a medieval town which shows their character in a way we have not seen before: it has become a site of truly international importance quite as outstanding as the most important excavations now going on in London".

The statement concluded "If the Wood Quay site is, as we are advised, of the utmost National and European significance, An Taisce feels that the only course to pursue, in order to eliminate any possibility of irreparable loss, is to undertake an immediate dig over the next few weeks to establish whether our advice is well grounded."●

A Fascinating Heritage

PROF. F. X. MARTIN is Chairman of the Friends of Medieval Dublin. CONSUELO O'CONNOR spoke to him about the new Society.



The Friends of Medieval Dublin came into existence in April 1976, and an Augustinian priest, Prof. F. X. Martin, who is Professor of Medieval History at U.C.D. is its Chairman.

The Group came together as a result of the Dublin Arts Festival '76, which focused its main theme on medieval heritage, to draw attention to the few visible medieval remains, and in particular to remains underground which are as yet undiscovered. The Group is comprised of people who have great expertise in different fields: medieval history, historical geography, architecture,

town planning, demography, and there is even a university lecturer in anatomy, amongst its members.

Since coming together, they have met on a regular basis in 63 Merrion Square, Dublin, by courtesy of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland. They try to diffuse an accurate knowledge of medieval Dublin and with this objective in mind, the Society is about to publish two maps which will be printed by the Ordnance Survey Office who have, it seems, some of the best technical printing machinery in Western Europe.

In the course of their activities, the Society were in touch with the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living & Working Conditions, whose Director and staff visited the Wood Quay site in the Spring of this year. They were so impressed by their tour that it brought home to Prof. Martin how little Dubliners know of their rich medieval heritage. It was then that the Society decided to organise tours of the site at Wood Quay with the help and blessing of Dublin Corporation. Guided tours took place every Saturday and Sunday from July to the end of September and over 12,000 people participated in them. "People were astonished that such a rich and fascinating heritage existed" says Prof. Martin. "There was wonderment that noth-

ing was being done about it and there was great anxiety about the future." The Visitors' Book, which was on the site, testifies to this.

Prof. Martin, whom I saw in his comfortable booklined office in Belfield has been hectically busy over the past few weeks and has averaged only two hours sleep per night because of his involvement in the Wood Quay controversy. While I was there, his telephone rang constantly, and people repeatedly came to see him, but he remained calm and courteous through it all.

He assured me that the Society would be in existence even if there had never been anxiety over the unexcavated part of the Wood Quay site. He was quite elated by the discovery only last week, that Christ Church deeds places St. Olaf's Church as being at Fishamble Street corner.

In conclusion, he said that while he accepts that the Civic Offices will be built on the controversial site, he, like An Taisce, just wants to see it finally and fully excavated before it is built over. He would like to see the appointment of a city archaeologist, qualified full-time, with special reference to the medieval city area within and without the walls. In addition, he feels that a full survey should be carried out of the medieval remains in the city●

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