

The Excavation of Medieval and Post-Medieval Features at 3 Kingsbury Square, Wilton

by Kate Taylor¹

with contributions by Sheila Hamilton-Dyer and Jane Timby

An excavation at Kingsbury Square, Wilton, located a number of intercutting pits and a wall. Of these, seven could be dated to the 12th century but were heavily truncated by later features. A large assembly of 12th–13th century pottery was mostly redeposited in the later contexts but, interestingly, no Saxon material was recovered despite the position of the site in Kingsbury Square, reputedly the location of the Saxon royal palace – hence ‘King’s burh’.

INTRODUCTION

An archaeological excavation was carried out in advance of the construction of a swimming pool in the grounds of 3 Kingsbury Square, Wilton, Wiltshire (SU 0971 3117) (Figure 1). The site lies on the valley floor close to the confluence of the rivers Wylde and Nadder, at a height of 54m OD. The underlying geology is valley gravel. An earlier 2m by 2m hand dug evaluation trench on the site (ASI 1999) identified relatively deep stratified deposits of 18th–19th century and late Medieval date. It was, therefore, proposed that the late Medieval deposits be investigated to at least the depth of the base of the pool prior to construction work. The excavation was carried out in April and May 1999 to a specification approved by Helena Cave-Penny, Assistant County Archaeologist for Wiltshire. The site code is KSQ99/26 and the archive will be deposited with Salisbury Museum.

Wilton was an important Saxon town, the capital of the shire and the home of the royal mint. The name ‘Kingsbury’ is thought to have developed from the King’s *burh*, a Saxon defended settlement (Haslam 1976, 90), and it has been postulated that this may be the location of the heart of royal Saxon Wilton. The town continued to thrive in the Medieval period although its importance declined

following the building of a new bridge at Salisbury in 1244. Little archaeological work has taken place within the town although recent excavations (Andrews *et al.* 2000) have examined a section of the Saxon defences at the north-west of the town as well as late Saxon and Medieval deposits in the south.

THE EXCAVATION

The 4.0m by 8.5m swimming pool was excavated using a 360° machine fitted with a toothless bucket. Modern topsoil and garden features were removed to a depth of c. 0.9m to reveal the top of the archaeological deposits, which only consisted of features cutting the natural gravel. These features comprised a large number of intercutting pits, two postholes, a wall and a possible floor surface. The presence of relatively modern material such as slate, combined with the pottery and stratigraphic evidence, allowed 14 pits to be dated to the 18th century or later, although they contained a considerable amount of residual Medieval pottery (Figure 1). No further work was done on these later features except to allow access to earlier deposits.

The seven pits and two postholes containing exclusively Medieval material were for the most part

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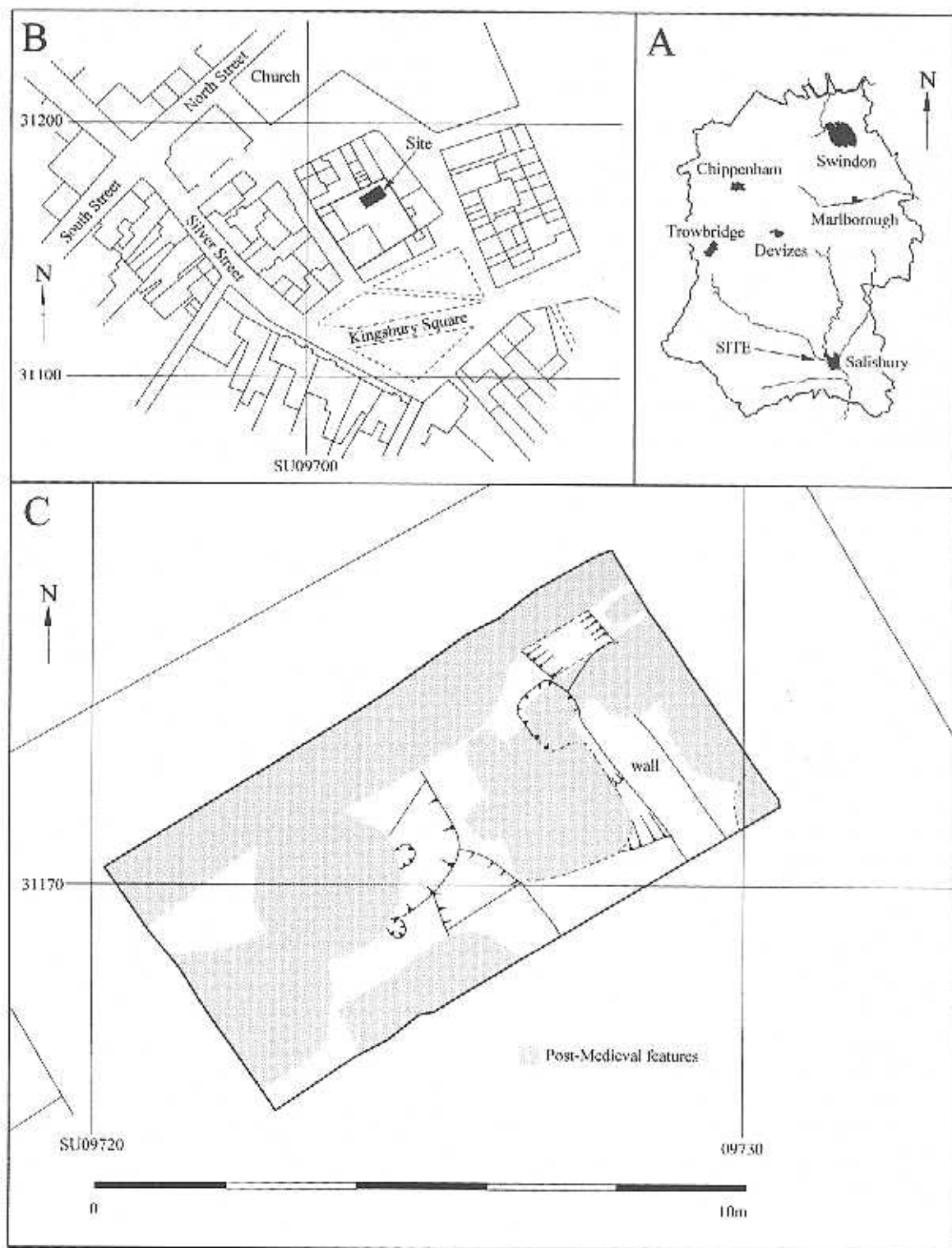


Fig. 1. Location of site within (A) Wiltshire and (B) Wilton, and plan of excavation (C)

heavily truncated by later activity (Figure 1). Some of the pits were intercutting, demonstrating that they were not all contemporary. The plan of the pits was mostly obscured but they were generally large, steep-sided and cut at least 0.60m deep into the gravel. Immediately to the north and east of the remains of a wall (see below), a large feature was revealed to be considerably deeper. However, as this was to be preserved *in-situ* below the formation level of the swimming pool, little further investigation took place. The pottery assemblage from these features suggests a date in the 13th century.

The only structural element on the site was a wall 0.70m wide. It did not survive above the top of the natural gravel but was 0.80m deep within the construction cut. The east face was of dressed limestone blocks with flint rubble packing behind; there was no evidence of a west face at this level. No datable material was recovered from the construction cut fill but the wall is stratigraphically later than three of the pits and cut by late post-Medieval features at the northern end.

A small patch of the natural silty gravel, truncated on three sides by both Medieval and post-Medieval features, appeared to have worn chalk pressed into its surface. It also contained charcoal flecks as well as two pieces of bone and a piece of worked limestone, but no datable material. This may have been a deliberately laid surface.

THE FINDS

Pottery

by Jane Timby

Some 852 sherds (19.8kg) of pottery dating to the Medieval and post-Medieval periods were recovered. An additional 72 sherds (1.6kg) from the preceding evaluation have been reported separately (Mephams 1999). There were no wares of Saxon currency present in the group.

Pottery from the post-Medieval/modern period was selectively retained so this note focuses on the Medieval wares which comprise some 95% of the material. Full details of the assemblage can be found in the pottery archive.

METHODOLOGY

The sherds were sorted into fabric classes and where appropriate were coded according to the regional

fabric series established at Salisbury (Trust for Wessex Archaeology) (cf. Mephams 2000a, b). Vessel forms follow the recommended nomenclature for Medieval pottery (MPRG 1998) and the Salisbury vessel type series (cf. Mephams 2000a; Underwood and Mephams *nd.*). A sherd count and weight were made for each recorded context and a number of vessels selected for illustration (Figures 2–3).

The material was recovered from a total of 23 features and six separate contexts, most of which date to the post-Medieval period with a small number of underlying Medieval cuts (see Table 1).

MEDIEVAL WARES

Much of the Medieval pottery was residual in later features but, despite this, it is noteworthy for its relatively tight chronology and good preservation, reflected in an overall average sherd size of 23gm. The group is dominated by the vessels of a single production source.

Most of the wares can be described as Laverstock-types (Salisbury fabric code E420–E422), comparable to the products of the 13th century Laverstock kilns excavated on the edge of Clarendon Forest, east of Salisbury (Musty *et al.* 1969). In total these wares account for 70% by count of the Medieval material. The coarsewares, E422 (subdivided in the basis of inclusion size into a) coarse, b) medium and c) fine), include jars, bowls, including West Country-types, jugs/pitchers, a possible crucible, a possible curfew handle and a single sherd from a moneybox. The jars include some cooking pots evidenced by sooting. Several examples have scratch-marked surfaces and occasional thumbing on the rims. At least one tripod pitcher foot is present and several other probable examples are represented by rim and handle fragments.

The fine wares (E420 for iron-free fabrics, E421 for iron-rich fabrics) mainly feature as decorated glazed jugs, and a single lamp.

The remaining 30% of the Medieval material (see Table 1) comprises a coarse angular flint-tempered ware, probably Kennet Valley ware (fabric E441); a micaceous coarseware containing variable amounts of flint, rounded quartz and occasional calcareous inclusions generally referred to as West Wiltshire micaceous ware (fabric E428); Naish Hill glazed ware; and a few miscellaneous sandy and other wares. At least 59 sherds are present from a single bowl, the glaze and fabric of which suggest that it is Tudor Green ware (15th–16th century) from the Surrey industries.

Table 1: Summary of Medieval wares

Fabric	Description	Medieval Contexts		Post-Medieval Contexts	
		No.	Wt.	No.	Wt.
E420	Laverstock-type fineware: iron free	0	0	12	796
E421	Laverstock-type fineware: iron rich	1	3	87	2783
E422a	Laverstock-type coarseware: coarse	26	416	26	1902
E422a/b	Laverstock-type coarseware: med-coarse	34	323	133	2797
E422b	Laverstock-type coarseware: medium	42	641	183	5752
E422b/c	Laverstock coarseware: medium-fine	4	88	1	7
E422c	Laverstock coarseware: fine	0	0	8	81
E428	West Wiltshire micaceous, flint/quartz/calc.	109	710	42	571
?E441	Kennet Valley ware	0	0	2	34
MEDSY	Medieval miscellaneous sandy	5	45	1	5
NASH	Nash Hill ware	0	0	6	81
TUDGR	Tudor Green ware	0	0	59	529
MISC.	Medieval miscellaneous	4	274	12	314
	TOTAL	225	2500	572	15652

DATE

The material from the exclusively Medieval contexts shows almost equal proportions of West Wiltshire micaceous plain wares and Laverstock-type coarsewares. Glazed finewares are scarce. Evidence from Warminster suggests that West Wiltshire wares date back to the 11th century overlapping with Laverstock-types in the 12th–13th centuries. Other sequences from Wilton have also demonstrated the presence of Laverstock-type wares prior to the known date range of the excavated kilns, suggesting an earlier phase to the industry. On balance a date in the 12th century may be appropriate for these Medieval features. The material from the post-Medieval features includes wares of more typical 13th century date. The continued accumulation of material beyond this date is illustrated by the presence of the 15th/16th century Tudor Green bowl and into the post-Medieval period with wares such as Verwood, Horton, English and imported stonewares, and industrial white earthenwares.

CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED VESSELS (Figures 2 and 3)

Note: Type numbers refer to the Salisbury vessel type series (cf McPham 2000a).

1. Handmade jar, fabric [428] with sparse flint. Light-brownish grey in colour with a grey core. [224] (289).
2. Everted rim pitcher, partly wheelmade. The body is decorated with a single tooled wavy-line and has a green glaze below the rim. Finely micaceous red-brown fine sandy fabric of West Wiltshire type. Source unknown. [223] (287).
3. Large handmade jar, fabric E428. Finely micaceous with sparse flint, quartz and calcareous inclusions. Grey to light brown in colour. [215] (271).
4. Jar with a beaded rim. The grey fabric has a dark green external glaze. Fabric E422b. [215] (271).
5. Handmade cooking pot, Salisbury type 3 with a thumb-pressed rim. Sooted on the exterior rim zone. Fabric E428. Dark brown surfaces with a grey core. [204] (255).
6. Handmade cooking pot, type 1, sooted on the exterior body below the rim. Scratch-marked surface. Fabric E422a/b. Brown-black surfaces with a dark grey core. [204] (263).
7. Handmade jar, type 3 with a thumb-pressed rim. Scratch-marked. Fabric E422a. Pinkish-brown surfaces with a mid-grey inner core with dark orange-pink margins. [204] (263).
8. Handmade jar, type 2 with scratch-marked exterior. Fabric E422a. Light grey exterior and core with pinkish-grey interior. [204] (263).
9. Handmade bowl/dish, type 4, Fabric E422b. Red-brown to black exterior, black interior and core. [204] (255).
10. Handmade bowl/dish, type 3, Fabric E422a/b. Brown surfaces with a mid-grey core. [204] (262).
11. Carinated bowl with an interior mid-green glaze. From the Surrey border industries and probably within the Tudor Green range. Sooted exterior. [204] (255).
12. Jug, type 3, decorated around the rim with applied, stamped pads. Fabric E421. The surfaces are covered in a dark green glaze over a grey fabric with pinkish surfaces. [206] (257).
13. Jug, type 2. The rod handle has incised herring-bone decoration. Patchy yellow-green glaze. Fabric E421. [209] (264).
14. Jug, type 2, with a rod handle. External mottled dark green glaze. Fabric E421. [209] (264).
15. Handmade jar, type 3, with an intermittently thumb-pressed rim. Scratch-marked surfaces. Fabric E422b. Dark orange exterior, pink-brown interior, grey core. [209] (264).

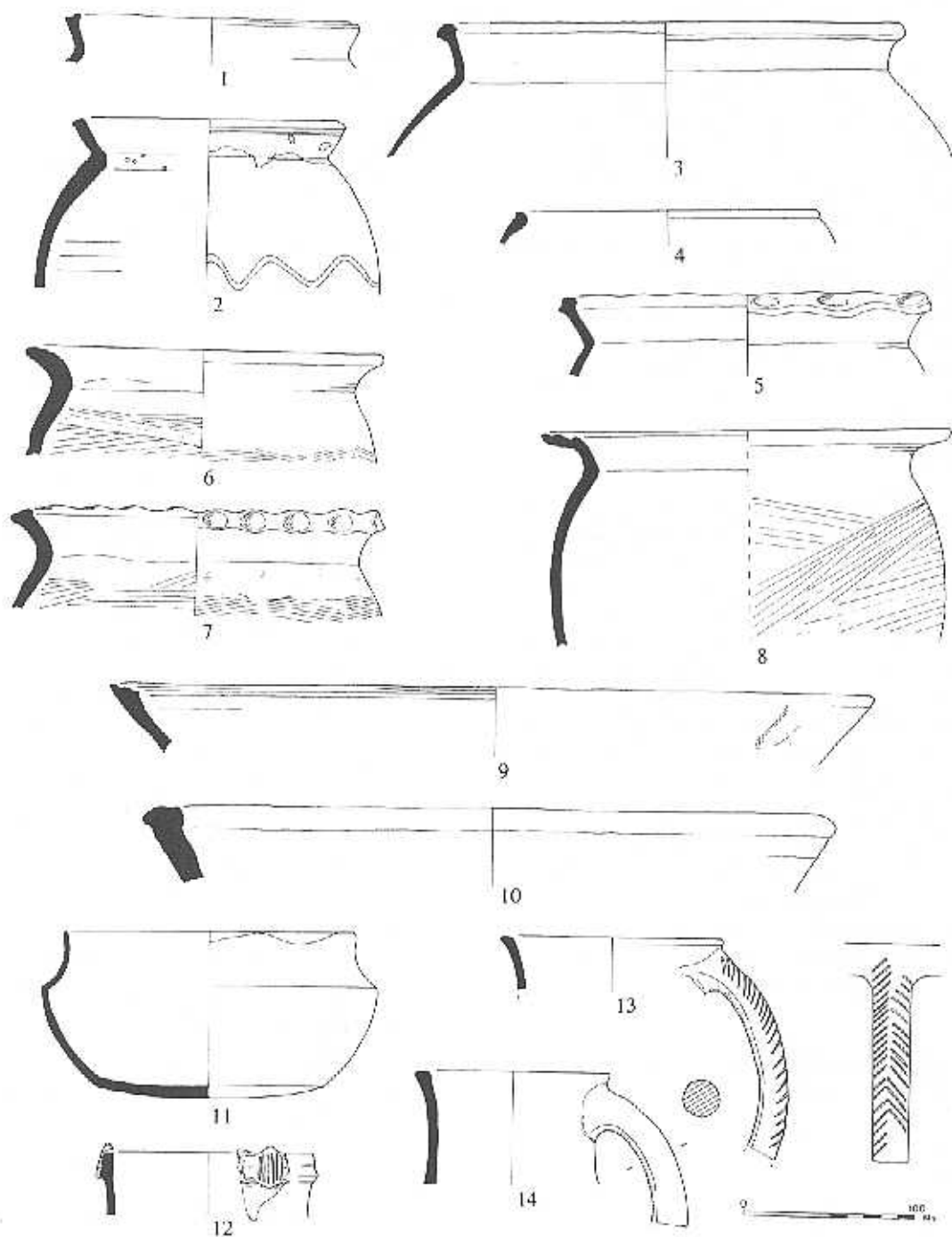


Fig. 2. Pottery, 1-14 (see text for detail)

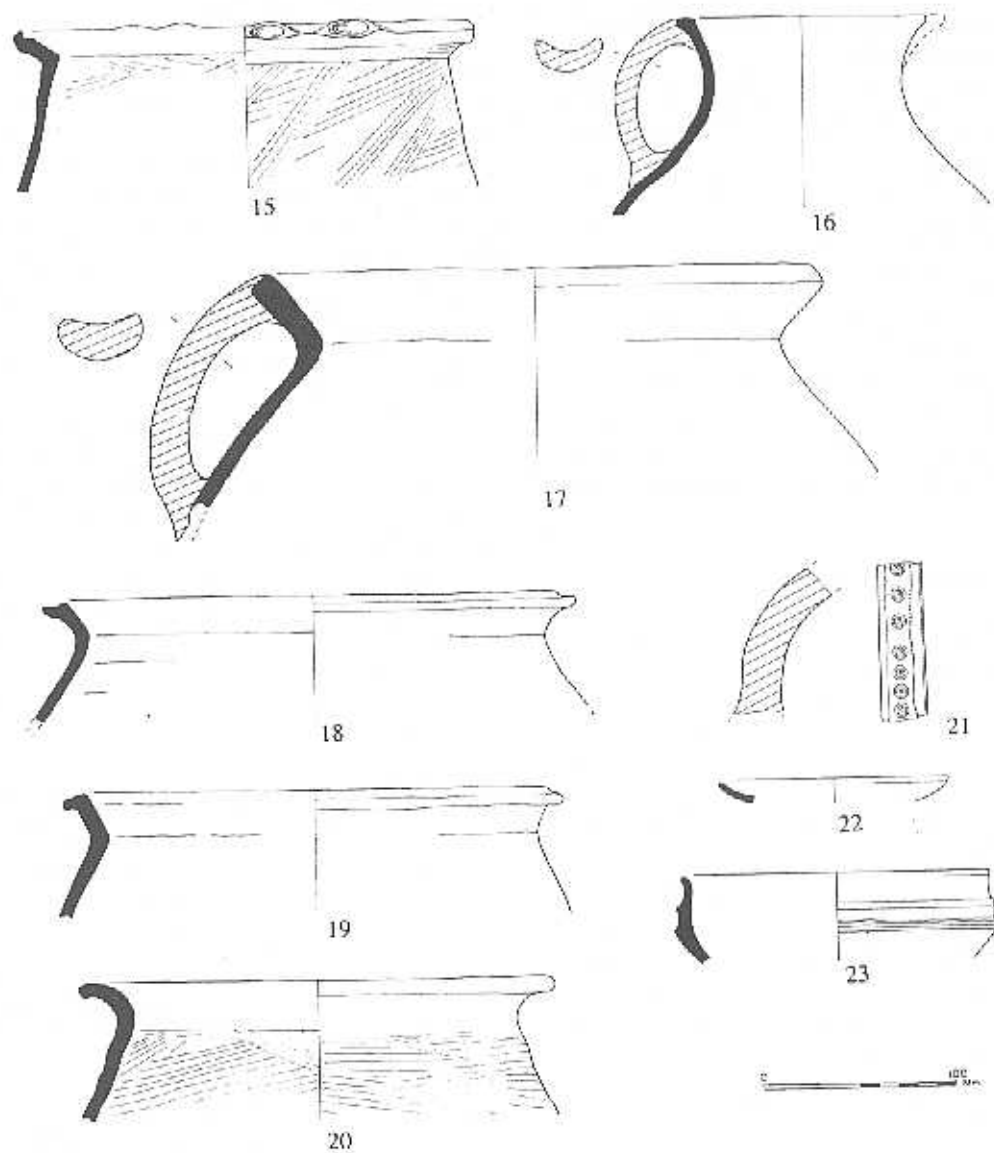


Fig. 3. Pottery 15-23 (see text for detail)

16. Handmade, unglazed jug with a simple pulled spout and strap handle. Fabric E422a. Black interior with a red-brown exterior. [214] (269).
17. Large, handmade handle jug/pitcher. Fabric E422a. Light grey interior, darker grey exterior. [211] (268).
18. Handmade jar, type 3. Fabric E422a/b. Red-brown with a light grey core. [219] (276).
19. Handmade jar, type 3. Fabric E422b. Dark grey with a red-brown core. [219] (276).
20. Handmade jar, type 1 with scratch-marked surfaces. Fabric E422a. Orange-brown surfaces with a mid-grey core. [219] (286).
21. Red handle from a jug decorated with impressed ring-and-dot and partially glazed. Fabric E421. (122).
22. Rim fragment from a lump with an internal mottled yellow-green glaze. E420. (122).
23. Wheelmade bowl with a green glaze on the upper exterior surface and ridge. Orange-brown sandy ware with a light grey inner core. Local late Medieval earthenware. (122).

Animal Bone

by Sheila Hamilton-Dyer

A total of 149 bones from Medieval contexts was recorded. The condition of the material is generally good. The majority of the bones identified to taxon are of the expected main domestic ungulates; cattle, sheep and pig. Horse is also present and dog is indicated by gnawing. Birds are represented by a few bones of domestic fowl and goose. Remains of wild resources are absent, at least in this small sample. Of the 37 bones that showed butchery marks, three had marks made with knives, the remainder had been chopped by heavy bladed implements. Many fragments are of meat bones, although the animals are mainly mature and, therefore, not animals killed at prime meat age but after contributing secondary products such as milk and wool.

A full report and catalogue is available in the site archive.

Other Finds

The other, mostly residual, finds from the site include: three undiagnostic prehistoric struck flints (identified by Steve Ford); 79 pieces of Medieval and post-Medieval brick and tile (identified by Nicola Powell); a late Saxon or Medieval honestone of Norwegian Ragstone and two pieces of worked limestone (identified by David Williams); and a heavily corroded copper alloy dish of Medieval or later date (identified by David Sim).

CONCLUSION

This small excavation has provided evidence of considerable Medieval activity on this site and in the vicinity. Whilst the excavated Medieval features date to the 12th century the large quantity of residual 13th century pottery in the later features suggests continued development nearby. The total absence of Saxon material in what was thought to be the heart of the town at this time may indicate that this area remained an open space until the 12th century.

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