

Medieval and later ceramic finds from St Mary's, Usk: Assessment Report

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Introduction

The ceramic finds from St Mary's Church, Usk, were submitted for identification and assessment. They indicate activity from the 12th or 13th-century through to the early modern period. Of particular note are the floor tiles, one of which is from a source in south Worcestershire and the other has been confirmed by petrological analysis to be a product of the Great Malvern tiliary, but from a previously unknown die. A sherd of 17th-century Italian marbled slipware is also of note, since these vessels tend to be found on high status sites (the author's only other record from nearby is from Goodrich Castle).

Summary

Forty sherds of pottery, 29 fragments of ridge tile and two floor tiles were present. Medieval pottery was present in four contexts, 24, 32, 46 and 47. Five wares were represented within the collection (Table One). One is possibly an import from south-western England and the remainder local to southeast Wales, although only one ware, from Penhow, can be tied to a precise source. Fragments of medieval ridge tile were present in contexts 24, 32 and 46. Two main wares were present, a highly micaceous fabric known from Chepstow (Chepstow Dc, Vince 1991) which was presumed to be locally produced, and sand-tempered fabrics similar to those from Chepstow thought to have been obtained from south Glamorgan, perhaps Cardiff (Chepstow Ea-e, Vince 1991). Fragments of four floor tiles were found, three were of Droitwich-type ware, a sand-tempered type decorated with thinly applied slip and of later 14th and 15th-century date. These came from contexts 003 and 32 and can all be paralleled with examples found elsewhere in the Severn Valley and south Wales. One is from a single tile pattern, a fleur-de-lis (AGV design 828), a second is from a nine-tile pattern (AGV design 801) and the third from a heraldic shield, similar but probably not identical to one recorded from Keynsham Abbey and identified as the arms of one of the Mortimer family (Lowe 1978, No.52, AGV design 777). The fourth tile, from context 025, is from the Great Malvern tiliary, which operated from the 1450s to the end of the 15th century. The design, a corner with stylised foliage, is probably part of a four-tile design used at Gloucester Cathedral in Abbot Sebroke's pavement between 1455 and 1457 (Fig 1). Several "daughter" industries were set up by Malvern tilers, including one at Monmouth, but this Usk piece includes large fragments of granitic rock together with a quartz sanded base which are identifying characteristics of Great Malvern products (Vince 1977, 259-62). The die is also found at the White Lion in Bristol and Little Malvern Priory, both on tiles made at Great Malvern and is also recorded at Monmouth. The latter examples, however, were produced in Monmouth itself.



Fig 1. Great Malvern Floor Tile (Context 25). Scale in cm.

Post-medieval pottery was poorly represented, by four sherds. However, of these four sherds, only one was potentially locally-made (Hereford A7D), one came from Malvern Chase (Hereford B5) and the other two were imports (a body sherd of Frechen stoneware, too small for its form, and therefore precise date, to be determined, and a sherd of a North Italian Marbled Slipware bowl, Hurst *et al* 1986, 33-7). A single fragment of a Malvern Chase ridge tile was found, in the lighter coloured fabric which first occurs in the mid 16th century (Hereford B5). These sherds, though few in number, indicate either a high status for this site in the later 16th and early 17th century or may be a reflection of increased access to trade throughout south Wales at this time. Most excavated 16th/17th century sites in south Wales have produced a high frequency of imported and non-local wares, but these sites are almost always high status settlements or ports (such as Chepstow, Carew Castle and Coity Castle).

Early modern pottery, ranging in date from the early-to-mid 18th century to the mid 19th century, was present in contexts 1, 4, 5, 22, 24 and 32. This included a pot lid for Patty & Co's Cold Cream datable to the 1860s (Fig 2).



Fig 2. Pot Lid from context 004

Aims and Objectives

The pottery and tile were examined with the intention of identifying the wares and forms present and using this information, together with stratigraphic data, to assess the importance of the archaeological deposits on the site. This assessment is considered under the themes of date and, within that, source and function.

Description

The range of wares present is shown in Table One.

Table One: Codes used in catalogue

Common Name	full name	period	earliest date	latest date	broad source	narrow source	source
MISC NW	Miscellaneous wheelthrown with sparse inclusions	nk			nk	nk	
A8	Forest of Dean sandstone-tempered ware	emed	1100	1350	England	Forest of Dean	
PENHOW	Penhow ware/Chepstow Fabric HA	med	1150	1350	Wales	Southern Gwent	Penhow
A7B	Hereford Fabric A7B	med	1230	1550	England	Welsh Borderland	various
CHHK	Chepstow Fabric HK	med	1250	1450	Wales	Southern Gwent	
CHNK	Chepstow Fabric NK	med	1250	1450	nk	nk	
GLAM	Glamorgan-type ware	med	1250	1450	Wales	South Glamorgan	
DROIT	Droitwich-type floor tiles	med	1350	1450	England	South Worcestershire	Droitwich
GM	Great Malvern floor tile fabric	med	1450	1500	England	South Worcestershire	Great Malvern
B5	Late Malvern Chase glazed	pmed	1530	1640	England	Worcestershire	

FREC	ware						
A7D	Frechen stoneware	pmed	1530	1680	Imported	Rhineland	Frechen/Cologne
	Post-medieval Welsh	pmed	1550	1750	England/	Welsh	various
	Borderland wares				Wales	Border	
NIMS	North Italian Marbled	pmed	1550	1650	Imported	Northern	Pisa?/Montelupo?
	Slipware					Italy	
CLAY	Clay Tobacco Pipe	PME	1600	1920			? numerous
TOBACCO		D					sources
PIPE							
SWSG	Staffordshire White	pmed	1700	1770	England	Staffordshire	? numerous
	Saltglazed stoneware						sources
TPW	Transfer printed ware	emod	1770	1900	England	Staffordshire	? numerous
							sources
BRIS	Bristol stoneware	emod	1780	1950			Bristol
NCBW	19 th -century Buff ware	emod	1800	1900	England	Staffordshire	? numerous
							sources
?ROMAN	Roman greyware?	Rom	40	400	nk	nk	nk
GREY FINE		an					

Date

With the exception of a small sherd of possible Romano-British greyware from context 004, the earliest pottery type present is the sandstone-sand tempered cooking pots, A8. Sherds of this type occur in early 12th-century deposits in Chepstow, but the ware was still used in the later medieval period, perhaps continuing in use into the early 14th century. The other medieval wares are likely to be of 13th- or 14th-century date, although in some cases production continued into the later medieval period. Whether this material represents a single, 13th-14th-century phase of activity or a sequence spanning several centuries can only be determined from further, stratified material. There are no distinctive types present which only occur in late medieval deposits and therefore no evidence for pottery being present between the late 14th and early 16th centuries. However, the floor tiles are all of this date, showing that the church floors were being relaid or repaired in the late 14th/15th and again in the late 15th centuries.

The post-medieval pottery occurs as single sherds rather than assemblages but does indicate activity in the later 16th or, more likely, early to mid 17th centuries. There is then a gap, with no sherds of late 17th/early 18th century date, and the one sherd of SWSG present is of a vessel decorated with scratch-blue (ie an incised design, emphasised by the use of cobalt-rich paint). This decoration was used in the mid to late 18th century and such vessels tend to have been kept as heirlooms and could therefore have been discarded in the 19th century, alongside the other early modern pottery.

Source

Most of the pottery and tile found comes either from local sources or from south Worcestershire (the Malvern Chase, Great Malvern and the Droitwich area). The lack of finds from Bristol or its hinterland (such as South Somerset or Wiltshire) is quite interesting, and a contrast with both Chepstow and Monmouth. Imports and unprovenanced vessels are rare (CHNK and NIMS) but are as likely to have reached Usk directly as to have come via Bristol. In either event, they indicate that people in Usk had wider contacts than their northern neighbours in the Welsh Borderland or Herefordshire.

Function

A major feature of the collection is the presence of ridge tiles, mostly being of 13th/14th century date but with a single 16th-century piece. It is uncertain whether such tiles would be used on a church, where stone coping or lead might be expected and they could be evidence for the presence of another, domestic building in the area. The remaining forms were mainly multi-purpose vessels used in cooking, serving and the storage of food. There is no obvious bias towards any of these functions.

Recommendations

Any further disturbance to the archaeological deposits at the site should be carried out under archaeological supervision and particular care be taken to identify and excavate deposits of post-medieval date. Medieval floor tiles are likely to be present in post-medieval and modern deposits and here too every attempt should be made to increase the size of the sample.

A note on the pottery and tile recovered from the evaluation (augmented with any material from subsequent work if available), based on the summary given here, should be published in an academic journal, so as to make the information more widely accessible.

Bibliography

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Vince, A G 1977, The Medieval and Post-Medieval Ceramic Industry of the Malvern Region: The Study of a Ware and its Distribution, in Peacock, D P S 1977, *Pottery and Early Commerce*, Academic Press, 257-305

Vince, A G 1991, The Medieval Pottery, in Shoosmith, R *Excavations at Chepstow 1973-1974* Cambrian Archaeol Monographs 4, 93-140

Catalogue

Context	Common Name	Form	Nosh	Description
	GLAM	RIDGE	2	KT CREST
001	SWSG	CUP	1	SCRATCH BLUE
003	DROIT	FLOOR	2	DESIGN 801
003	DROIT	FLOOR	1	DESIGN 828
003	A7B	RIDGE	3	
003	A7D	RIDGE	4	
003	CHHK	CIST	5	LARGE FOOTED VESSEL
003	B4	RIDGE	1	
003	GLAM	COST	1	
003	GLAM	RIDGE	19	INCISED DEC
004	TPW	PILL BOX LID	0	LID FROM A COLD CREAM JAR FOR PATTY & CO. C.1860
004	TPW	CUP	1	
004	TPW	PLATE	2	
004	MISC NW	FLP	2	
004	A7D	RIDGE	1	
004	NIMS	BOWL	1	
004	SWSG	TANK	1	
004	?ROMAN GREY FINE		1	
005	NCBW	BOWL	1	
022	BRIS	JAR	1	
024	A8	CP	2	
024	PENHOW		1	
024	A7B	JUG	2	
024	GLAM	RIDGE	1	WAVY COMBING
024	CHHK	RIDGE	1	KT CREST
024	CHHK	RIDGE	5	
024	GLAM	JUG	3	INT GLAZE
024	GLAM	JUG	1	
024	CHHK	RIDGE	5	
024	GLAM	RIDGE	5	
024	MISC NW	FLP	1	
025	GM	FLOOR	1	DESIGN 1217
032	A8	CP	1	
032	TPW	PLATE	1	
032	PENHOW	JUG	1	
032	A7B	JUG	1	ROD HANDLE
032	A7B	JUG	1	
032	A7B	JAR	1	
032	CHHK	RIDGE	2	
032	CHNK	JUG	2	
032	GLAM	RIDGE	2	WAVY COMBING
032	DROIT	FLOOR	1	DESIGN 777
032	MISC NW	FLP	1	
032	MISC NW	TILE	2	
032	B5	RIDGE	1	
032	A7D	RIDGE	1	
032	A7D	JUG	1	PULLED LIP
032	CLAY TOBACCO PIPE	BOWL	2	19C
032	SWSG	BOWL	1	
046	PENHOW	JUG	1	SH=24
046	GLAM	RIDGE	2	COST
046	GLAM	RIDGE	1	KT CREST
047	A8	CP	1	
050	FREC		1	
054	B5	JUG	1	