

Weoley Castle:
A Reappraisal of and Report on the Pottery,
Appendix 7: Midlands Purple and Later Wares



by
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An Archaeological Overview of Weoley Castle, Birmingham

Summary

Weoley Castle is a fortified, medieval manor-house situated four miles to the southwest of Birmingham city centre in the historic county of Worcestershire (National Grid Reference SP 02158275). The site entered into the ownership of Birmingham City Council in *c.*1930 and thereafter two campaigns of archaeological excavation were undertaken; between 1932 and 1940 and 1955 and 1962. More recently the site has been subject to an ambitious initiative, “*The Weoley Castle Development Project*”, joint funded by Birmingham City Council, The National Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage. The aims of the project were to consolidate the surviving masonry, to increase community understanding of and involvement with the monument and to re-assess the finds collection and surviving archaeological archive. The following reports form the third strand of the initiative, “*An Archaeological Overview of Weoley Castle, Birmingham*”. The project was undertaken by Barbican Research Associates, managed by Stephanie Rátkai and monitored by Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery and was submitted in final form in August 2011, consisting of a series of reports on the archaeological archive, the ceramic finds and the small (portable) finds etc. The reports were presented in PDF format and will be available on-line, hosted by BRA (see www.barbicanra.co.uk for links). Hard and digital copies of the reports will be held by BMAG at selected museum properties. It is intended that the reports will form the basis for a synthesised monograph publication intended to bring knowledge of this important monument and the results of its past excavations to a wider audience.



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Midlands Purple Ware and Later Fabrics: Figures A7.1-7

Midlands Purple ware was less common than might have been expected given the date range of the later medieval deposits. The fabrics are not described here as they are usually iron-rich and effectively highly-fired or over-fired versions of the Late Medieval oxidised wares. In addition to the iron-rich Midlands Purple fabrics above, there was also one fabric (originally recorded as Fabric LM01h) which was made from an iron poor clay which fires a light dirty brown/yellow (not illustrated).



Figure A7.1: Midlands Purple jug - 15th-16th century

Accession: 2000A2.40 Provenance: M Nt M57 (written on pot). This code suggests it was found in the 1957 excavations in the moat in the area of the North Tower

NB The minisys catalogue lists this as 'two rim sherds' which it clearly is not



Figure A7.2: WC1057 Midlands Purple Ware Mammiform Costrel,

Accession: 2000A2.47 Provenance: Moat clay layer (g) (illustrated by Oswald (1962, Fig. 13.57)

This vessel (**Figure A7.2**), probably of 15th century date, is published by Oswald (1963, fig. 13, 57). A very similar vessel was found at Burton Dassett in SE Warwickshire (pers. inspection by author) in a 15th century context, although the vessel there had looped handles rather than the pierced lugs seen on the Weoley example. The pierced lugs suggest that the costrel is a copy (or skeuomorph) of a leather vessel. Costrels were used as liquid containers. They are designed to be transportable by horse or by cart, hence the flattened back but domed front. However, unlike a leather counterpart, the ceramic version would be extremely heavy when full.



Figure A7.3: Midlands Purple Ware Jug
Accession: 2000A2.85.5 Provenance: South Tower A

This plain, hard fired, plain functional vessel with minimal glazing of the upper section of the jug is typical of Midlands Purple ware. Midlands Purple Ware was less common at Weoley than the other late medieval wares.



Figure A7.4: Midlands Purple Ware

Accession 2006.0141.2: Provenance : Moat, '1a Top Rubble'

This sherd is possibly a handle from a pipkin or skillet. If so it would be unlikely to be earlier than the 16th century. However it is possible that it is part of some elaborate roof furniture.



Figure A7.5: Midlands Purple sherd decorated with triangular roller stamping

Accession: 2000A2.89.4 Provenance: ? (T2 ½ (2) WC PB2)

Although most late medieval pottery is undecorated, roller stamped decoration is sometimes found on Midlands Purple ware (**Figure A7.5**). The decoration is found on either jugs or cisterns (bung-hole jars).

Later Wares

Figure A7.6: WC23 Heavily restored whiteware vessel of unknown function - c1550-1650?
Accession: M117 '50 Provenance: Unknown

This vessel is very heavily restored and it is now difficult to gauge how accurate the restoration was. As it stands, the vessel is unparalleled. The perforations only towards the top of the vessel suggest that they were intended to allow a certain air-flow into the vessel, rather than being associated with straining or draining the contents. The cut-outs in the rim would also encourage an air-flow once a cover or lid was in place. It therefore appears that the vessel was intended to hold embers or charcoal. This in turn suggests that the vessel functioned as a chafing dish or fuming pot, although neither are known in this form.

The somewhat dull but good quality greenish glaze may indicate that the vessel is in a reduced Midlands yellow ware. If so, then it dates to c 1550-1650.

Post-Medieval: Slip-Coated Ware

Figure A7.7: Slip-coated Ware Porringer
Accession: 2006.0141.2 Provenance: Moat South

This is one of the few later post-medieval vessels from the site. The brick red body has been coated with a red slip in order to produce a black colour under the clear lead glaze. It dates from the later 17th to 18th centuries.