

Weoley Castle: The decorated window glass

by

Stephen J. Linnane



*Saint Paul from the church of St. Nicholas, Stanford on Avon, Northamptonshire
bearing stylistic similarities to the Weoley Castle fragments (CVMA)*

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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Weoley Castle: The decorated window glass

by

Stephen J. Linnane

Introduction

G.M. Bark noted in his July 1932 report to the Birmingham City Council (Scans 1033-1035, page 2) that amongst the finds were "... leaded lights, stained glass" and a little later "The glass discovered appears to be of two kinds "pot" and "flash". The pot glass, which appears to be blown in one piece, is well preserved, while the flash, which is made in layers, powders badly when dry and is difficult to preserve. ..."

Unfortunately no more survives as to his observations on the glass other than what is described below from the surviving archive.

The paper archive has been digitised by Kirsty Nicholls and consists of the scanned images detailed in Table 1, a total of twenty Scans.

Scans	Description
096-104	Scrappy drawings combined to form the basis for Scans 113-14
105	Photograph of a single piece
106	Photographs and drawings combined, various pieces
107-112	Published article by Frank Raw
113-114	Drawings of the 43 pieces which form the principal base for the following catalogue
115	A letter - dated 15 th October, 1973 - from Ruth Taylor, Assistant Keeper at Birmingham Museum

Table 1, the digital archive

Within the scanned archive there are drawings and photographs of approximately 50 glass pieces. No doubt many excavated pieces were plain and did not deserve further recording and possibly some disintegrated; medieval window glass is very prone to do this as Dr. Raw's report would indicate. The two principal Scans are 113 and 114 which contain drawings of 43 pieces and these form the principal base for the following catalogue. These scans are occasionally supplemented by illustrations from Scan 106 and photographs of the objects in store. None of the elements within the archive allocate Small Finds numbers to individual pieces.

Scan 115 is of a letter - dated 15th October, 1973 - from Ruth Taylor, Assistant Keeper at Birmingham Museum, to Miss Clarke of the Department of the

Environment at Fortress House. The letter expresses concern about the state of the pieces which had been returned to the museum and been badly damaged in transit. The letter reveals that the museum had commissioned a report on the glass fragments, which it had not received, and equally importantly provides Small Find numbers for at least some of the fragments. Small finds numbers WC989 to WC994 had been allocated to the window glass in question; neither these pieces, nor their given numbers, have been identified in the archive.

An article entitled *The Long-continued Action of Water on Window-glass: Weathering of the Medieval Glass of Weoley Castle, Birmingham* was published by Frank Raw D.SC. in the *Transactions of the Society of Glass Technology*, 1955, Vol. 39, Pages 128-33 and appears within the archive as Scans 107-112. The report is a detailed scientific report on the causes and results of chemical/environment deterioration in the excavated glass. Within the report Dr. Raw notes that

“... especially within the moat and in a dungeon. In these was much weathered window-glass”.

Quoting G.M.Bark, the excavator, he also notes that

“Many hundreds of pieces of painted glass have been recovered, all of early fourteenth-century character”.

He also noted that the glass was excavated in 1932 and that he was commissioned to undertake the analysis in 1934.

A necessarily brief inspection of the glass revealed that it was all stored in metal cabinet CU30 within the Central Museum Store; No. 2000A2, 39 – no WC numbers were allocated or noted attached to the glass. There were ten drawers within the cabinet, containing a total of 340 pieces (approximately). The majority of the glass fragments had undergone conservation treatment which has helped to slow disintegration but which makes it difficult to discern the type and colour of each glass piece. Only in Drawers 8 and 10 of the cabinet, where the glass had lost its surface decoration and outer decay, could colour be seen; clear, yellow, green and red glass were noted.



Piece of red glass from Drawer 8

Drawer No.	Quantity of pieces	Description
1	33	Edging designs, 113r, 113s, 113m
2	29	Architectural designs 113l, 113f and edging design
3	24	Mostly grisaille, also 113l
4	38	More grisaille
5	41	Quatrefoil motifs etc.
6	60	113g, drapery 113y etc. Also stick-work grisaille
7	14	More grisaille
8	60	Surface detail mostly gone
9	-	Worked and painted slate – see Appendix A
10	41	Surface detail mostly gone

Table 2, Contents of Cabinet CU30

Note: not all the pieces illustrated in the following catalogue were identified within Cabinet CU30.

The Glass Catalogue

The following catalogue is primarily based on the drawings on Scans 113 and 114 and the numbering of individual pieces refers to these scans. The catalogue also includes some elements from Scan 106, where there is significant additional information and with enhanced photographs taken of the collection as it is now stored – the coin used as a scale on the photographs is a one pence piece. The individual drawings on Scans 113 and 114 may have been assembled at different scales.

Lettered Pieces



114c



114d

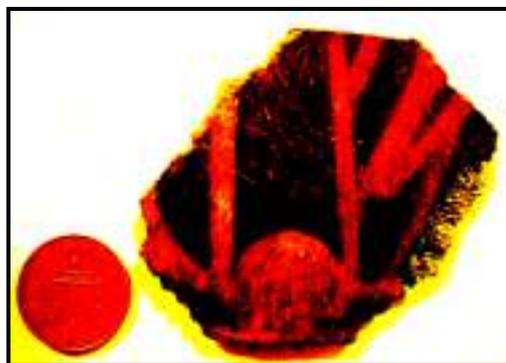
Two fragments of glass with lettering in a lombardic script were illustrated: the first with the lettering :S:PA..., the second ...NES: The fragments are from a title/border and presumably refer to a saint or saints. The crossed S in 114c, followed by PA..., could represent Saint Paul (**PAULUS**) whilst the ...NES of 114d could be the end of the Latin form of Saint John (**JOHANNES**). If this were correct it might suggest that figures of the saints were depicted in the stained glass windows. Lombardic script had gone out of use by the middle of the 14th century to be replaced by the gothic black letter script.

Drapery

Unfortunately only one fragment of painted glass depicting drapery has been tentatively identified. No fragments depicting the human form or saints' symbols have been identified. The piece appears to show a pipe-like fold at the edge of a garment.



113y



Photograph of 113y

Heraldic Glass



114a



de Somery arms (or, two lions passant azure)

The only fragment to be considered as heraldic shows the paw of a lion (possibly the right side rear). The glass dates from the late 13th to early 14th century and this would correspond with the re-building of the castle by the de Somery family begun in the later 13th century and no doubt continuing into the 14th. The fragment shows great similarities with the de Somery heraldry panel which is currently in the Burrell Collection of Glasgow Museum. A number of similar fragments were excavated at Dudley Castle, enough to convince the present writer that the Burrell panel was made by the same artist as the Dudley glass and that at least some of the Dudley panels found a new home when the castle chapel was refurbished in the mid-16th century. Heraldic panels were frequently placed as central motifs within a larger expanse of grisaille decoration.

Architectural details

Very frequently an image of a saint or donor was surrounded with a border consisting of architectural detail rising vertically on either side of the main image to end in a gabled canopy above the head. The fragments identified below could all have formed elements in such a scheme. Fragment 113f shows the top of a gable and 114h could be a fragment of something similar whilst 113z appears to show a trefoil above a two-centred arch not dissimilar to that in 113f. Fragment 114e reveals a trefoil-headed door/window framed by a two-centred arch. Fragment 114m, a quatrefoil design,

could be part of a repeating border but equally could have formed an element within the overall architectural design. Lastly, fragment 114j bears a striking similarity to the crockets above some of the canopies in the Merton College Chapel windows which are discussed below.



Photograph of two gable designs as in 113f



113f



113z



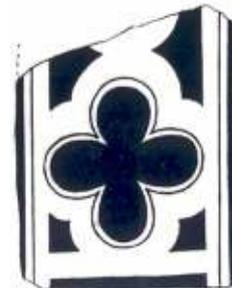
113b



114e



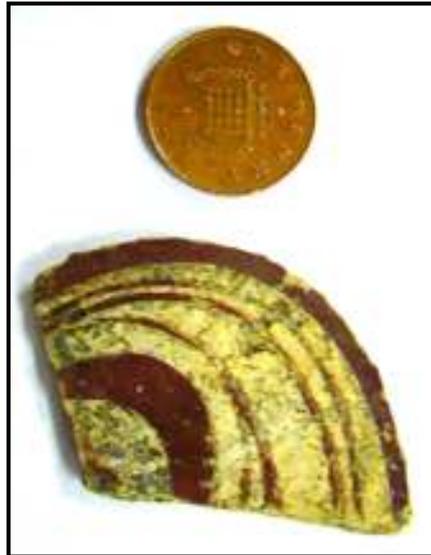
114h



114m



114j



Photograph of part of 114j

Straight Border



113a

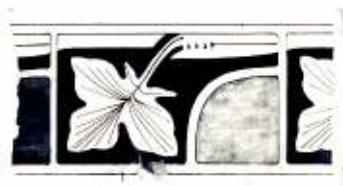


114b



113d

A rectangular piece with a fleur de-lys design, 113a, and a fragment identified as a castle design, 114b, have been combined to create a border design which is common on windows of this period, 113d.



113c



106

The illustration above shows piece 113c used as part of a re-constructed border design; similar designs are found in the Merton College Chapel windows as vertical edging to both grisaille and stained glass panels.

Note: See Appendix A for another example.

Curved Borders

There are six pieces cut as curved borders: 113t is undoubtedly part of the grisaille, vine-leaf design – illustrated in that section, 113r is the only example of the repeated lozenge design and 113q, 113s, 114l and 114o are all variations on the same theme of a scalloped design

The borders could have been required as elements within the pictorial design or as essential in finishing a panel within the trefoil heads of the decorated style windows with which the chapel was undoubtedly furnished.



113r



113s



113q



114l



114o



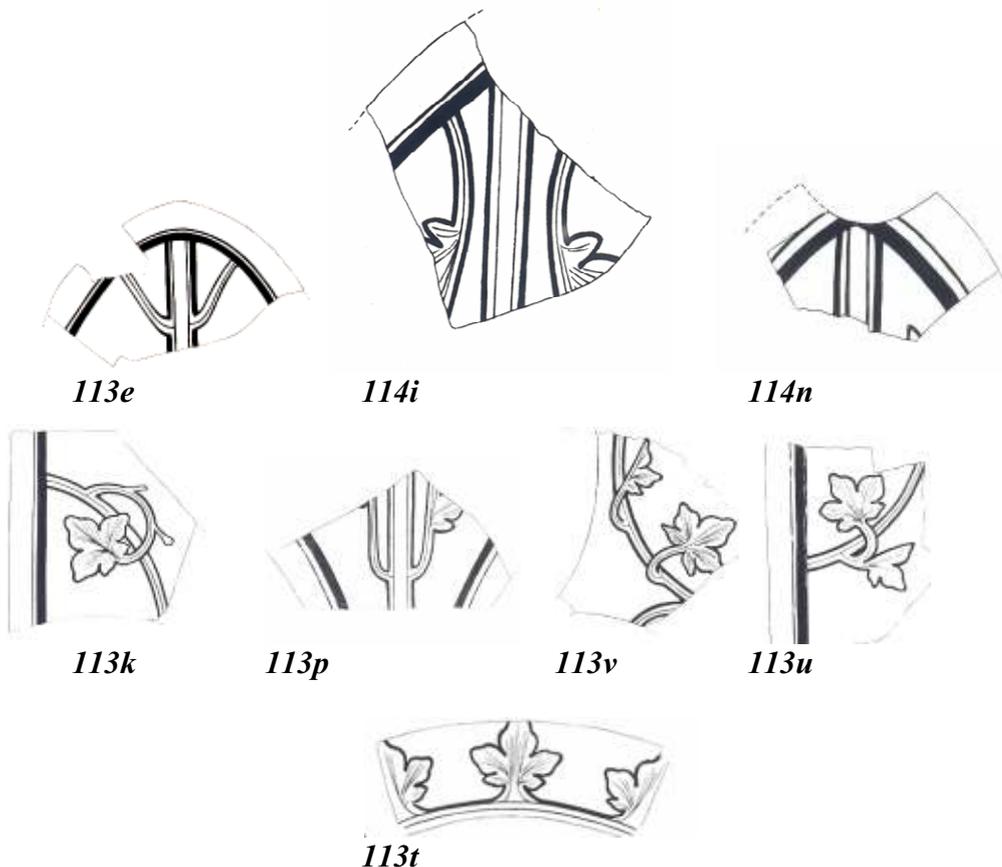
Photographs of fragments of designs 114o and 113r

Grisaille Decoration

Grisaille decoration commonly consists of painted decoration on a clear, grey or green tinted glass. The decoration normally takes the form of interwoven vegetation, frequently of oak leaves and acorns. The nine pieces illustrated below all have stems and leaves of the vine. Such decoration allows more light into the chamber than conventional stained glass.

The pattern frequently spreads from a central, vertical stem within the panel and the pieces 113e, 114i, 114n and 113p all appear to be fragments of this part of the design. The shape of the quarries would indicate a leading pattern of curvilinear form rather than the more common straight-sided diamond quarries. Again a comparable design can be seen at the Merton College Chapel in Oxford, where the grisaille work surrounds a central panel of coloured glass. It is possible that the heraldic shield (114a) formed such a centre-piece. It can be noted that there is some variation in the size of the leaves - 114i and 114j are much larger than the majority of the pieces – suggesting that more than one panel once existed.

A considerable quantity of such glass fragments was excavated at Dudley Castle from a backfilled moat in the vicinity of the stables.





Photograph of 114i



114j



Photograph from the collection

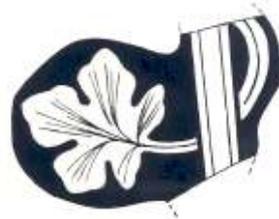
The six fragments below would have been from a similar design to the grisaille above but here the quarries have been painted and then paint removed to create a much darker affect where the leaves would have stood out against the dark background. The technique is commonly called stickwork. The leaves are vine except for 113w and 113x which are oak.



113c



113i



114p



113o



113w



113x

Stand-alone Designs



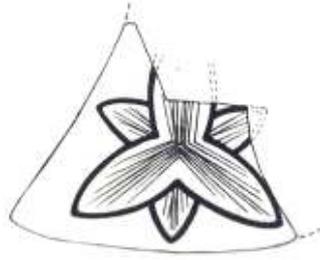
113l



114g



Photograph of 113l



114q



113n

Stand alone designs could have been used within the central motif, as part of the architectural surround or within the borders of the whole light. Generally as quatrefoil, flowers in square quarries but also in a circular quarry and superimposed trefoils as in 114q.

Other pieces



114f



114k



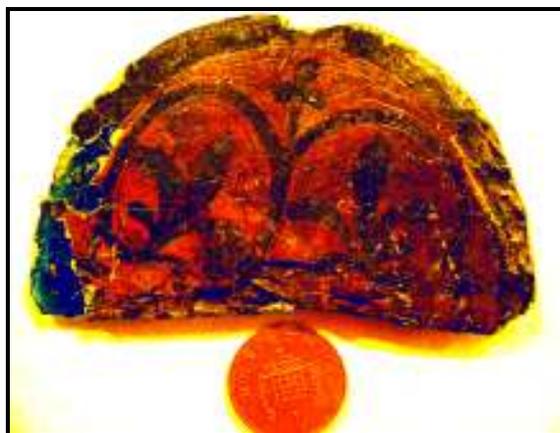
113m



113h



113g



Photographs of 114f and 113g

The five pieces shown above differ from the preceding pieces in that they are of a finer quality of design, with smaller detail, which does not appear in the other pieces. A technique where the paint has been applied and then removed to form the pattern with a needle has been used on 114f, vine-scroll and 114k, a diaper pattern - the hatched piece 113m may have used a similar technique. Fragment 113h appears to be a grisaille design with part of a flower head (a lily?) shown and 113g, vegetation pattern is unlike any other illustrated piece.

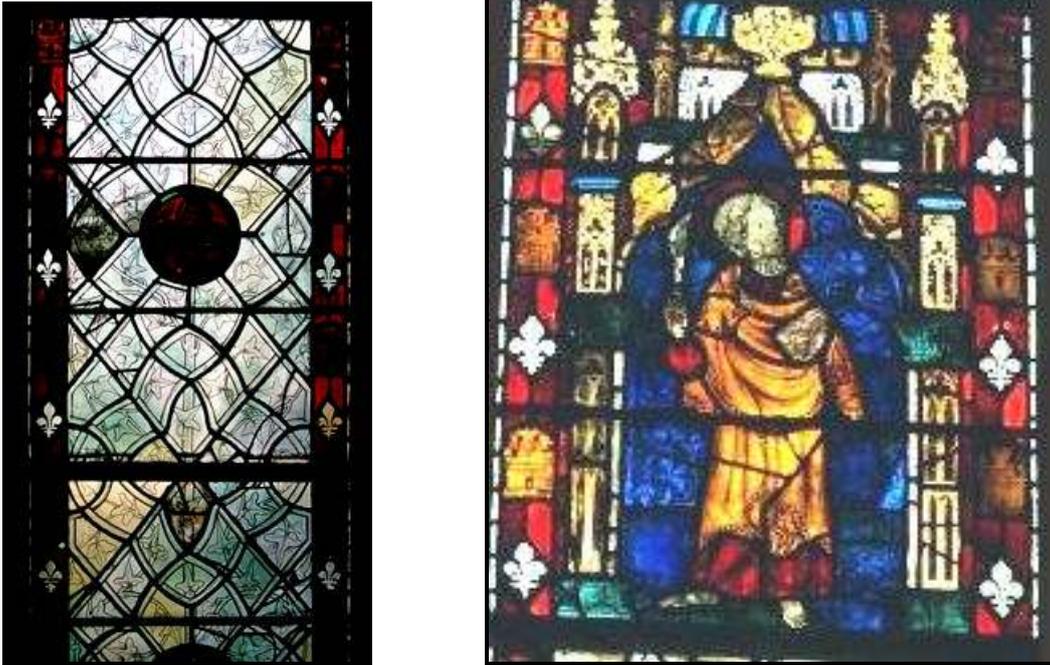
Conclusions

The majority of the glass was excavated as early as 1932 by G.M. Bark who believed the glass to be of early 14th century date. This dating still holds true as both technical and stylistic elements within the glass fragments conform to this date. The lack of three-dimensions within the architectural pieces, the use of lombardic lettering and the stylistic similarities to windows of known date (particularly Merton College Chapel) all point to the fact that the majority, if not all, of the pieces date to the late 13th - early 14th century, presumably installed by the de Somery lords at the time of their major re-constructions of both Weoley and Dudley Castles.

Assuming that all the glass came from the castle chapel, it seems probable that the windows were glazed with some panels of stained and painted glass and others of plainer and lighter grisaille work – a design known as banded work. The combination often occurs within the same light where grisaille work occurs both above and below a coloured panel. It seems probable that the windows contained images of saints, possibly including St. Paul and St. John, Baptist or Evangelist, and that at least one panel bearing the arms of de Somery was included, possibly as a centrepiece to the grisaille decoration. The central images would have been surrounded by a decorative canopy with details of windows, gables and crockets and outlined by vertical borders containing fleur-de-lys and castle images. The lions paw fragment resembles both the Burrell collection panel, dated to the early 14th century, and fragments excavated at Dudley Castle.

The fragments and conjectured layout of the glass bear similarities to the windows of Merton College Chapel in Oxford which were donated to the college by Henry de Mamesfield, Chancellor of the University and dated to 1298-1311. Here the windows are three light and the stained glass panels are situated in a band across the lights with grisaille panels above and below. The grisaille panels usually have a central motif,

frequently heraldic, in stained glass. The main stained glass panels show the donor and various saints within cusped canopies. Similarities between the Weoley Castle fragments and the Merton College windows include the Lombardic lettering, certain architectural details e.g. the crockets on the gabled canopies, borders of fleur-de-lys and castles and the grisaille patterns centred on a central vertical stem.



Two panels from Merton College Chapel showing grisaille work spreading from a central stem, on the left, and a Saint within a cusped canopy, to the right, note the fleur de lys and castle border arrangements.

Bark excavated stonework which he believed to have come from the chapel and which he compared to the window forms of Stokesay Castle in Shropshire – presumably those in the Hall.

“ stones with mouldings – late 13th century – some have glass grooves and are part of a two-light window with simple cusped tracery (e.g. Stokesay) ...”

Taken from Scan 971, 1932 Finds

The hall was built shortly after 1281 when Lawrence of Ludlow, a wealthy wool merchant, took possession of the castle and it seems possible that the windows of Stokesay and Weoley Castles were similar, both being defended manor houses rather than castles.



Stokesay Castle, showing the Hall windows facing into the courtyard.

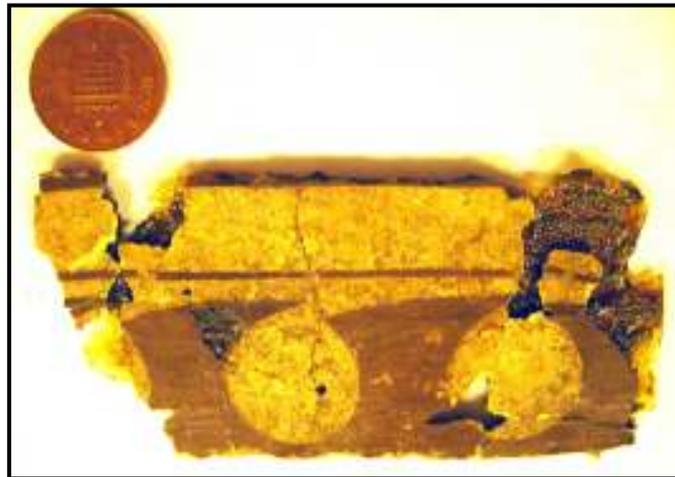
As mentioned elsewhere in this report large collections of glass fragments were recovered during excavations at Dudley Castle. The glazing of both Weoley and Dudley castles were being undertaken at the same period for the same family and it is to be expected that there would be similarities between the two sets of fragments. Unfortunately the Dudley Castle archive is not readily accessible at this time and detailed comparison between the collections must await the future.

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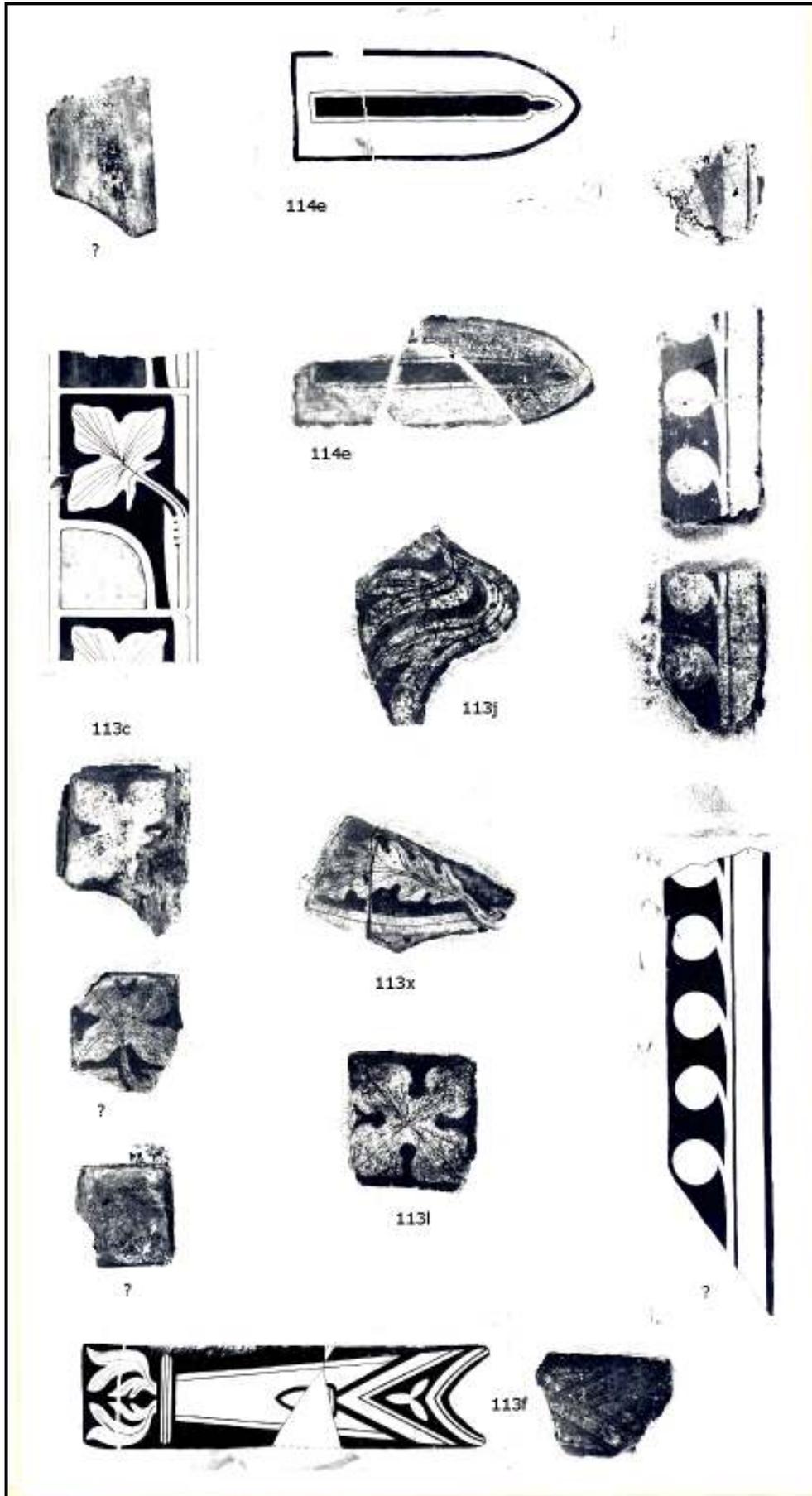
Appendix A: Scan 106

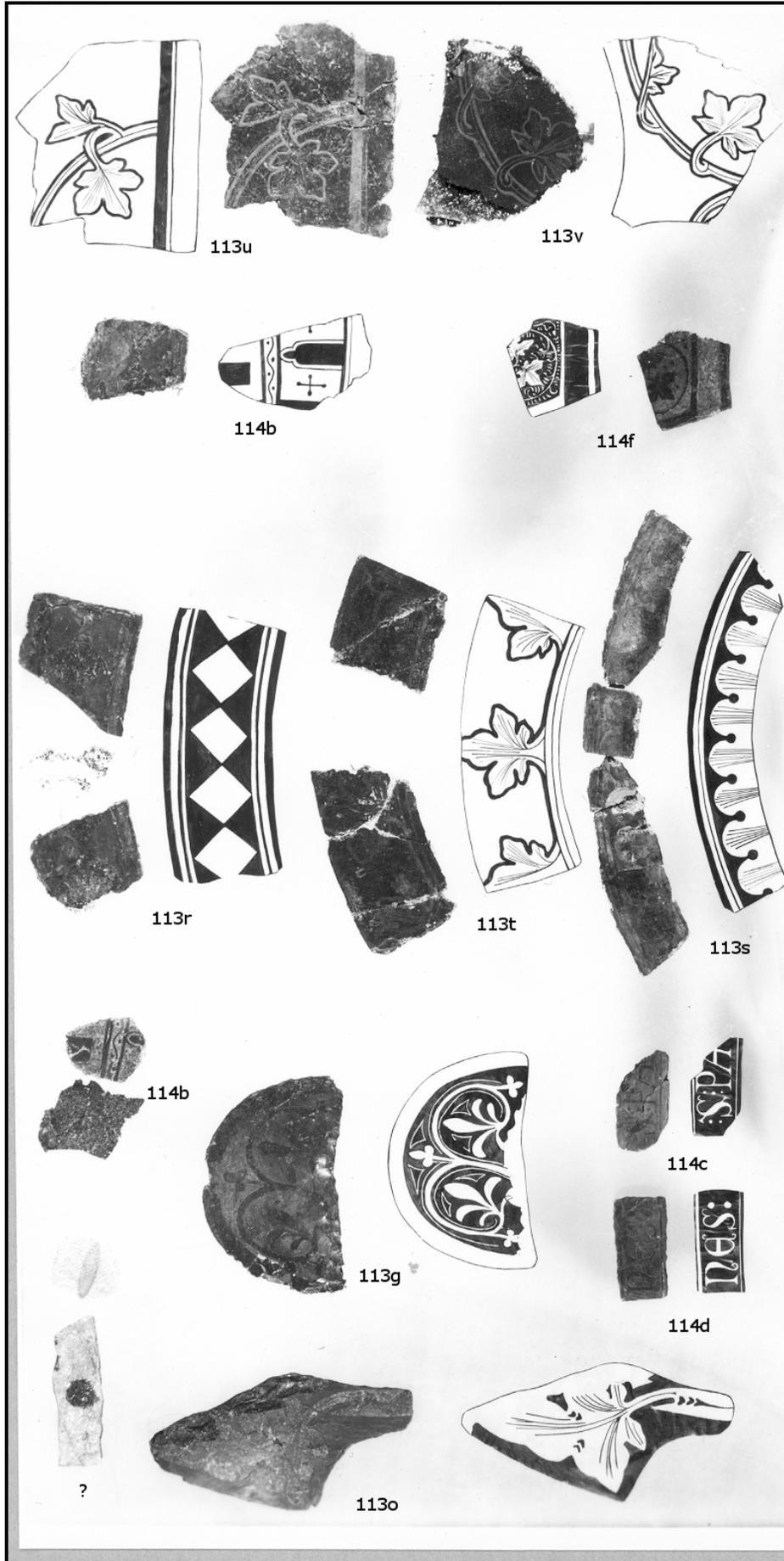
This scan consists of two sheets mounted on brown card with drawings adjacent to photographic images of an assortment of glass fragments. In general the fragments can be identified with those illustrated in Scans 113 and 114 and the two attached images 106f and 106g are annotated accordingly. However there are some small but interesting differences. The straight border design shown below does not appear on Scans 113/4 but is identical to fragments found in cabinet CU30.



Photograph of piece from cabinet CU30

The architectural gable in 113f is shown on 106 surmounted by an elaborate pinnacle which unfortunately is not recorded elsewhere. On Scan 106, 114e is shown as far more complete than on Scan 114.





Appendix B: Weoley Castle – the painted slate

Cabinet (CU30, accession no. 2000A2, 39, no WC coding) contained painted window glass. Drawer 9, however, contained approximately 50 pieces of slate, some very small, which had been painted with designs. The designs are not clear but the enhanced images produced below do clarify them somewhat. The usual paint colour is a red/brown, not unlike that used on the painted window glass, but there are also fragments with orange/brown and at least one with a white chalky coating which may have been intended as a paint, possibly lime-wash that has gone powdery. The designs are generally linear, occasionally similar to hatching, but with some curving lines, especially around the edges of the more complete pieces.



Two pieces showing the red/brown and orange/brown paint



Piece decorated with red/brown and white paint

Some of the larger pieces with curving edges have the edges outlined in paint suggesting that the edges were deliberately shaped and then high-lighted in paint, as below



There is no information as to the provenance of these pieces from within the castle but as they are associated with the window glass it might be safe to assume that they were excavated at the same time as the majority of the glass and from the same place which was from the northern arm of the moat or the cellars in the north-eastern corner of the castle.

It seems possible that the shaped slate pieces were intended to repair broken glass within a leaded window and that the original window was of some complexity with curvilinear leading. In the absence of glass to replace broken pieces it is probable that horn would be a preferred substitute – at least it transmits light. In the absence of more suitable materials it is conceivable that slate was used, although the painted patterns could not have been clear with light coming in from outside. An alternative usage could have been as trial pieces, the slate being shaped in a manner similar to glass i.e. grozed and painted in an amateurish way – the work of an apprentice perhaps. No parallels for this class of find have been found in the literature as yet.

Below are a few further examples of the painted slate, a full record of all the pieces has not been made.

