

APPENDIX 11: ASSESSMENT OF SHELL

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Conservation by Liz Barham

1. Introduction

1.1 A single shell artefact was recovered by hand excavation from the excavation works.

1.2 The artefact may be of use in answering the following fieldwork event aims:

- *to determine the function and economic basis of the site*

2. Methodology

2.1 The shell object has been examined and given an individual accession number, and the data was recorded on an accession card and on the Oracle database.

3. Quantification

Table 22: Assessment of shell

Context	Special Number	Material	Count	Period	Comments (Description)
585	65	Shell	1	MD	Oyster shell palette with traces of a bright red pigment – vermilion?

4. Provenance

- 4.1 The shell palette was recovered from context [585] (the fill of a structural cut, possibly associated with a wall), Group 198, sub-group 116, which also produced pottery dating to *c* 1175-1250.
- 4.2 The shell is in a reasonable condition with traces of pigment attached to its inner surface.

5. Conservation

Analysis & preparation for archive deposition.

- 5.1 Please refer to the metalwork assessment for details of the aims of conservation work on finds from this site. The pigment on [585]<65> will require analysis by the conservation department to identify it. Some consolidation of the shell and secure re-packaging are also required for long term stability.

6. Comparative material

- 6.1 Comparison should be made with other sites in the area such as Old Soar, Plaxtol to see if shell palettes are common and whether they have been found on other rural sites. A number have been found on sites in London, some with vermilion and comparison may also be made with these.

7. Potential for further work

- 7.1 The only fieldwork event aim that this find may apply to is:
- *to determine the function and economic basis of the site*
- 7.2 The shell palette probably dates to the early medieval period, possibly the 12th to 13th centuries. It is an extremely interesting find on this site as it indicates the possible existence of painted walls in the building. The pigment is possibly vermilion, whose use increased during the 12th century, although it would still have been an expensive commodity (Pritchard 1991, 71). Shell palettes are more usually found associated with important buildings (the Guildhall in London and Clarendon Palace, Wiltshire) or churches (Boyton Parish church, Wiltshire). Therefore, the discovery of one associated with a rural moated site in Kent is of great interest, in terms of what it potentially infers about the appearance and use of the building, as well as the wealth and status of those who lived and worked there.

- 7.3 The only Landscape Zone aim that the palette can be applied to is:
- *towns and their rural landscapes (100 BC-AD 1700)*
- 7.4 Comparison should be made with assemblages from other moated sites to see if any have produced shell palettes and did any produced evidence for painted plaster or stonework.

8. **Bibliography**

Pritchard, F, 1991 Small Finds, in *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London: 2 Finds and Environmental Evidence* (ed A Vince), London and Middlesex Archaeol Soc Spec Pap 12