

Medieval and later pottery and tile from St Mary's, Abergavenny (sma97): Assessment Report

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Summary

Fifty five fragments of pottery and tile were recovered from the St Mary's, Abergavenny, excavation (site code sma97). With the exception of a single fragment of Samian ware of Roman date, they range in date from the 13th century (or just possibly the 12th) to the 19th century. The pottery consists of a small group of 13th/14th-century sherds, then a group of late 17th/18th-century material and finally a small collection of 19th-century sherds. Thirteen fragments of floor tile were present. The earliest examples come from a very worn pavement composed of Nash Hill tiles, from Wiltshire and dating to the later 13th or 14th century. Fragments of later 14th/15th-century Droitwich-type tiles and two examples from the late 15th-century Monmouth tility were also present.

Aims and Objectives

The aims of the assessment were to identify the material, provide a catalogue and concordance and to assess the potential importance of the remaining archaeological deposits on the site and the academic value of the collection from the evaluation excavation.

Description

The range of wares present is shown in Table One.

Table One: Range of Wares present and codes used in catalogue

Comm on Name	full name	period	earliest date	latest date	broad source	narrow source	source
A8	Forest of Dean sandstone-tempered ware	emed	1100	1350	England	Forest of Dean	
A7B	Hereford Fabric A7B	med	1230	1550	England	Welsh Borderland	various
B4	Malvern Chase glazed ware	med	1250	1550	England	Worcestershire	Malvern Chase
NH?	Nash Hill ware	med	1250	1500	England	Wiltshire	Nash Hill, Lacock
DROIT	Droitwich-type floor tiles	med	1350	1450	England	South Worcestershire	Droitwich
GLOS 110	Gloucester TF110	med	1250	1450	England/Wales	Southern Welsh Border	nk
MONM OUTH	Monmouth-type floor tiles	lmed	1450	1500	Wales	Southern Welsh Border	Monmouth
A7D	Post-medieval Welsh Borderland wares	pmed	1550	1750	England/Wales	Welsh Border	various
NDGT	North Devon Gravel-Tempered ware	pmed	1600	1900	England	Southwest England	Barnstaple
STCO	Staffordshire combed press-moulded ware	pmed	1650	1800	England	Staffordshire/Bristol	various
STSL	Staffordshire/Bristol slipware	pmed	1680	1800	England	Staffordshire	Staffordshire or Bristol
NOTS	Nottingham stoneware	pmed	1690	1900	England	Nottinghamshire	Nottingham
STMO	Staffordshire/Bristol mottled-glazed	pmed	1690	1800	England	Staffordshire	
PEAR	Pearl ware	emod	1770	1900	England	Staffordshire/Bristol	various
TPW	Transfer printed ware	emod	1770	1900	England	Staffordshire	? numerous sources
NCBW	19 th -century Buff ware	emod	1800	1900	England	Staffordshire	? numerous sources
DERB S	Derby Stoneware	emod	1830	1900	England	Derby	Derby

Date

A single sherd of Hereford Fabric A8, sandstone-tempered ware, is potentially the earliest sherd from the site. However, although it might date back to the early 12th century this ware had a long life, continuing into the 13th century. North of the Forest of Dean it tends to give way during the 13th century to a limestone and sandstone-sand tempered ware, GLOS110, also represented on the site by a single sherd. Two other medieval sherds were found, one of Hereford Fabric A7B and the other of Malvern Chase ware (B4). The latter is a knife-trimmed jug base of a type likely to date to the late medieval to Tudor period, c.1350-1550 whilst the former is a thumbled jug base of later 13th or 14th-century type.

The main find of high medieval date is the collection of floor tiles. With two exceptions, which are of later 14th-century Droitwich-type (DROIT), the tiles are of late 13th/early 14th-century type. Two potential sources for this type of tile are known: Nash Hill, near Lacock in Wiltshire, and a local offshoot of the Nash Hill industry, whose products are known from a small number of sites in Gwent, principally Moynes Court, near Chepstow (Vince 1979). Without scientific analysis of the fabric it is difficult to be sure, but visual examination suggests that they are from Nash Hill. However, the only die discernable on the nine fragments, seen on two examples, is a diagonally-set shield, with foliage to either side. The arms are the Royal Arms (Fig. 1). This die has not been noted at Nash Hill, although a similar design is present (Eames 1974, Fig 24 No 2) differing in the size of the quarry (the Nash Hill examples are much larger) and in the use of bands on the body of the lions. Two further floor tiles are products of the Monmouth tilery, a "daughter" industry set up by tilers from Great Malvern in the second half of the 15th century. The two designs are similar in style to others used in the Great Malvern and daughter industries. One (Fig.2) is a four-tile design with a black-letter inscription - FIAT VOLUNTAS DEI - around the arms of England. Examples are known from Great Malvern Priory itself and from Gloucester Cathedral (though not in the surviving part of Abbot Sebroke's pavement (Kellock 1989, 186, cf No.23). Both of these sites were supplied directly from the Great Malvern tilery. The second (Fig 3) is a four-tile pattern consisting of a band containing a black-letter inscription (DOMINE JESU MISERERE) enclosing stylised flowers and foliage. Examples of this die have been found in excavations at Cirencester Abbey, Glos., where they occur on tiles made in the Malvern Chase tilery, in the late 15th or early 16th century. It is likely that this is the same die as was used in the Lady Chapel pavement at Gloucester Cathedral (c.1468-82), made at Great Malvern but towards the end of the 15th century. Its presence on tiles made at Monmouth is therefore a valuable guide to the date of the Monmouth tilery, which is very likely to have been later than the Lady Chapel pavement at Gloucester Cathedral but earlier than the Cirencester Abbey tiles made in Malvern Chase. It is strange, however, that this is the only one of the Lady Chapel dies to have been found, to date, on Monmouth-type tiles.



Fig 1. Floor tile, possibly produced at Nash Hill, Lacock, Wiltshire



Fig 2. Floor tile, produced at Monmouth using a die cut at Great Malvern in the late 15th century



Fig 3. Floor tile, produced at Monmouth using dies made at Great Malvern in the late 15th century

The remaining ceramic finds are of post-medieval and early modern date. They include a collection of late 17th/early 18th-century slipwares (STCO, STSL, STMO) and stonewares (NOTS), together with locally-produced redwares which are probably contemporary (A7D). A sherd of North Devon Gravel Tempered ware (NDGT) probably dates from this period too. The only ceramic roof furniture from the site is of similar date (A7D).

The early modern pottery appears to be of 19th-century date (PEAR, TPW, NCBW and DERBS).

Source

By and large, the range of wares present at Abergavenny is comparable with that found in Monmouth and, to a lesser extent, Hereford. In other words, Abergavenny looked to the east and north for pottery rather than the south. This being the case, the presence of possible Nash Hill floor tiles, which can only have arrived at the site via Bristol and the south Gwent ports, is of some interest. Nash Hill tiles have, however, been identified using thin-section analysis at Goodrich Castle and a possible identification has been made by eye at Raglan Castle. Clearly, the Nash Hill tiles in this part of the country indicate a high status benefactor.

Function

The most distinctive characteristic of the collection is the number of floor tiles present. The medieval and post-medieval pottery show typical ranges of forms, and therefore probably indicate a range of activities, including the preparation, storage and serving of food and drink.

Recommendations

The floor tiles are of considerable interest and illustrations of the dies used should be published in an academic journal, alongside a short note on the collection. The pottery is of less interest but should be retained in an archaeological repository for future study.

Bibliography

Eames, E S, 1974 The Tiles, in McCarthy, M The Medieval Kilns on Nash Hill, Lacock, Wiltshire
Wilts Archaeol Mag **69**, 131-145

Kellock, A 1989 Abbot Sebrok's pavement: a medieval tile floor in Gloucester Cathedral *Trans Bristol Gloucestershire Archaeol Soc* **107**, 171-188

Vince, A 1979 Medieval Floor Tiles from Moyne's Court, Gwent *Medieval and Later Pottery in Wales* **2**, 14-17

Catalogue

Context	Common Name	Form	Nosh	Description
002	GLOS 110	COOKING POT	1	
002	?SAMIAN		1	
002	STSL	MUG	1	WHITE BLOBS ON BROWN SLIP
002	PEAR	CUP	1	PAINTED BLUE DEC
002	TPW	TANK	1	
002	NCBW	BOWL	1	
002	B4	JUG	1	KT BASE
002	A7B	JUG	1	THUMBED BASE
002	STCO	DISH	1	
002	NDGT	BOWL	1	
002	NOTS	TANK	1	
002	A7D	JAR	1	
002	A7D	CUP	1	
002	A7D	RIDGE	1	
002	A7D	BOWL	4	
002	A7D	PIP	1	
002	A7D	BOWL	2	
002	STSL		1	
002	STMO		1	
015	DROIT	FLOOR	1	PLAIN BLACK GLZ
015	STCO	DISH	1	
015	A7D	JAR	1	
015	A7D	BOWL	2	
015	STMO	POSS	1	
030	GM?	FLOOR	1	
030	MON?	FLOOR	1	
030	A8	COOKING POT	1	
030	NH?	FLOOR	1	
030	NH?	FLOOR	2	ROYAL ARMS
030	NH?	FLOOR	2	WORN
030	DROIT	FLOOR	1	1/2 RECT
106	PEAR	JUG	1	
106	DERBS	INKW	1	
106	NH?	FLOOR	1	MORTAR UPPER/WORN
106	NH?	FLOOR	3	WORN
106	A7D	RIDGE	4	
106	A7D	TANK	1	
106	STSL	POSS	1	
106	STMO	TANK	5	