

Assessment of the medieval pottery from 118-122 Jacob Street, Bristol (BRSMG 2004/9)

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One hundred and fifty sherds of medieval and early post-medieval pottery from an archaeological excavation at 118-122 Jacob Street, Bristol, excavated by Bristol and Region Archaeological Services, were submitted for identification and assessment. These sherds represent no more than 148 vessels and weigh in total 1.296 Kg.

The pottery ranged in date from the 12th to the early to mid 17th centuries and includes a number of sherds of Bristol Medieval ware (aka Bristol Redcliffe ware) which are possibly production waste of 14th-century date. These sherds are scattered throughout the stratigraphic sequence, indicating a large amount of residuality and recycling. A small quantity of later 16th to mid 17th-century pottery was present on the site and there is an absence of pottery which can be dated with certainty to the later 14th, 15th or early 16th centuries.

Description

Twelfth to mid 13th-century pottery

Thirty-eight sherds of pottery were of types which first occur in Bristol in the 12th century. However, with one exception, the sherds are likely to be of 13th-century date, belonging to the later phases of production of the wares concerned.

Bath Fabric A (BPT 46 or BPT 73)

Bath Fabric A was produced in western Wiltshire, probably at several centres, from the 11th to the 13th (or early 14th-) centuries. The five sherds from Jacob Street are all from handmade jars.

Box Fabric B (No BPT Number)

A single, abraded, sherd of Box Fabric B was recovered. Like Bath Fabric A, the fabric has a silty groundmass and contains sparse rounded, polished quartz grains. However, it also contains abundant rounded calcareous and opaque inclusions which distinguish it. The ware is likely to be of later 11th and 12th-century date and is probably the earliest sherd in the collection.

Minety ware (BPT 18, 18E, and 145)

Seven sherds of handmade Minety-type ware were recovered. These were probably produced on the Wiltshire/Gloucestershire border, in and around the village of Minety.

Production seems to have started in the early 12th century but all of the sherds from Jacob Street are likely to be of early to mid 13th-century date. They include handmade cooking pots, of the type with a sharply everted rim and plain lead glaze along the inside of the rim, and tripod pitcher sherds. Most of these sherds are undecorated. A rim and handle sherd has a wide strap handle decorated with diagonal slashed lines. The inside of the rim is stabbed with a knife numerous times, to help secure the handle to the rim.

One sherd of tripod pitcher had clay fused to the glaze and glaze running over a break. It was also completely oxidized whereas these vessels normally have a reduced core.

Ham Green B (BPT 27)

Six sherds of Ham Green B ware jugs were found. Five are plain and one is decorated with horizontal combed lines. Such vessels were probably first made in the 12th century but continued to be produced well into the 13th century.

Ham Green Redware (BPT 32)

Eighteen sherds of Ham Green redware were recovered. All are from jars, some of which were definitely used for cooking and have soot on the exterior or deposits on the interior. Two sherds had everted externally beaded rims. Five were body sherds with horizontal combed decoration and one sherd came from a small jar with a plain everted rim and wavy combing on the shoulder.

Later 13th and 14th-century pottery

Wheelthrown Minety ware (BPT 84)

Three sherds of wheelthrown Minety ware were recorded. Two were from jars, of Selsley Common type, and one was from a jug.

Bristol Medieval Ware (BPT 118)

Ninety-nine sherds of Bristol Medieval ware were recovered. Most came from jugs with an external copper-stained lead glaze but examples of other forms were also present. These consist of an aquamanile fragment, a sherd from a baluster or conical jug with an external copper-stained glaze, two sherds of unglazed conical jugs, the profile of a small dish, a possible sherd of dripping dish, five jar sherds, two sherds from jars or dishes, and five fragments of ridge tile.

The jug sherds include several with a plain lead glaze and applied plastic decoration, either self-coloured or of fine red clay. Most were too small to determine the overall design but in some instances the decoration consisted of horizontal red clay bands, in others of curvilinear bands, in others or vertical red clay strips (in one case combined with a self-coloured pellet)

and in one case the vessel seems to have been an anthropomorphic jug with a large red clay brooch in the centre of the body and a self-coloured arm and hand resting on the brooch. Other decoration consisted of: horizontal grooves; a band of horizontal grooves, at the shoulder of the jug. Only two rim sherds were found, both of the devolved collar rim type used on Ham Green B jugs. Two sherds of bridge spouts were found. Five fragments of handles were found, all of the strap kind. Two of these were undecorated, including one 34mm wide. One had a central column of diagonal slashes between two vertical grooves and another probably came from a similar handle. The last example had a central column of stabbing, again similar to that found on Ham Green B jugs.

Two jug base sherds were found, one an undecorated flat example and the other from a vessel with a thumbled frill (as on Ham Green B vessels).

Twenty five sherds of Bristol Medieval ware show signs of being waste or seconds, in the form mainly of glaze along broken edges or red clay fused onto the glaze during firing but including some overfired and warped sherds. These sherds include the possible dripping dish, two sherds of jars or dishes, the flat jug base, 16 plain jug sherds with copper-stained glaze on the exterior, three jug sherds with internal and external copper-stained glaze and the two plain strap handles, both with a copper-stained lead glaze. As a group, these sherds are typical of the plain vessels produced at Bristol in the 14th and 15th centuries. None of the vessels with features typical of 13th-century Ham Green ware, or with applied decoration and a plain glaze, had any signs of being waste.

Nash Hill ware (No BPT Number)

A sherd of Nash Hill ware jar, from the Nash Hill, Lacock, kilns in west Wiltshire, was recovered. This ware has a rounded quartz sand temper in which many of the grains are polished and some are stained with haematite. The tile industry at Nash Hill is thought to have started in the 1270s but it is possible that the pottery industry was already in existence by that date.

Unknown glazed ware (No BPT Number)

A sherd from a wheelthrown jug with a fine, silty fabric, and sparse rounded quartz sand grains was recorded. It is possibly a South Somerset product of later medieval date but does not appear to be post-medieval South Somerset ware (aka Donyatt ware).

Later 16th to mid 17th-century pottery

Border ware (No BPT Number)

A sherd of Border ware, from the Surrey/Hampshire border (1992) was recorded. It has an internal copper-stained green glaze and appears to be from a roughly cylindrical vessel.

Several Border ware vessel forms match these criteria of which the most common is the porringer, common in the mid 17th century.

Saintonge ware (BPT 160 and 232)

Part of a polychrome-glazed chafing dish in Saintonge ware was recorded. The form is of Hurst's Type C.I (Hurst 1974) and has an applied face in which the original human aspect has devolved to such an extent that it has virtually none of the original characteristics (eyes, nose, mouth). A similar vessel found in Ipswich was published by Hurst (1974, Fig 7 No.28). This type is dated by Hurst to the 16th century (1986, 80) but the precise date is impossible to determine. A number are found in later 16th and early 17th-century contexts however.

An unglazed sherd from a jug or similar closed vessel is also possibly of this date, although unglazed Saintonge wares are found as early as the later 14th century.

South Somerset ware (BPT 96)

Four sherds of South Somerset ware were recovered. They come from bowls (2 sherds, including a rim), a jar and a jug. This ware first appears in the later 16th century but is common throughout the 17th and into the 18th centuries in the Bristol area.

Staffordshire Redware (BPT 109)

A base sherd from a Staffordshire Redware tankard of mid 17th-century or later date was recovered.

Tin-glazed ware (BPT 99)

A sherd from a maiolica charger, with a lead-glazed back and tin-glazed interior, decorated with broad blue (cobalt) lines outlined with narrow purple (manganese) lines were recovered. This type is likely to be of mid 17th century date and could be of local manufacture.

Assessment

Stratigraphic interpretation

Table 1

cname	BPT	1	2	3	4	5	Grand Total
BATHA	46	2		2	1		5
BORDG	NK					1	1
BOXB	NK	1					1
BR	118	23	8	44	21	3	99
HG	27	3		1	1	1	6
HGR	32	10		4	4		18

MEDLOC	NK		1		1		
MINETY (HM)	18	2	4	3	9		
MINETY (WT)	84						
NH	NK		1		1		
SAIP	232		1		1		
SAIU	160		1		1		
SSOM	96		3	1	4		
STRE	109		1		1		
TGW	99		1		1		
Grand Total		41	8	64	31	5	149

The pottery came from 17 contexts, the most productive of which, 463, produced 53 sherds whilst all but three contexts produced less than 10 sherds. Since even the smaller groups are clearly mixed and contain types which are unlikely to have been in contemporary use it is difficult to interpret the material.

The pottery came from five phases of activity. The earliest of these was a soil layer, 488 and 607 (Table 1, Column 1). The pottery from this layer included the earliest sherd from the site, which is the only piece to be abraded (Box Fabric B). However, it also contains a group of early to mid 13th-century wares (Bath Fabric A, Minety, Ham Green and Ham Green Redware), sherds of late 13th-century Bristol Medieval ware and sherds of 14th-century Bristol Medieval ware, including probable waste. The mean weight of the sherds indicates that the largest sherds are those of the early to mid 13th-century (c.16gm) whereas the Bristol Medieval ware sherds are smaller, and those with 14th-century characteristics or evidence for wastage are smaller still (6gm). This suggests that the later wares may be intrusive, being brought down into the soil in the 14th-century or later as a result of animal disturbance, tree roots or the like.

The next phase of activity consists of a pit, fill 516, cut through the lower soil layer (Table 1, Column 2). This produced eight sherds of Bristol Medieval ware, of which three might be of later 13th-century date (mean weight 5gm) and 5 of 14th-century date (mean weight 15gm).

The next phase of activity consists of an upper medieval soil layer, contexts 463, 524 and 602 (Table 1, Column 3). The majority of the pottery from this soil (63 sherds in total) is of the same types as in the lower soil, in roughly similar proportions. In addition, there are a small number of later 16th to mid 17th-century sherds.

The upper medieval soil was cut by eight features which produced pottery (484, 487, 492, 493, 494, 500, 520 and 525, Table 1, Column 4). However, only 31 sherds were recovered in total, and most of these were extremely small (mean weight 5gm). They include one small

late 16th to mid 17th-century sherd (Context 500) and the rest were of precisely the same types as were present in the earlier soils. It is likely that these features contain no contemporary pottery.

Finally, a post-medieval soil overlay the upper medieval soil and sealed the features which cut it (490 and 523. Table 1, Column 5). Only 5 sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from this soil, all of types found in earlier deposits, apart from the Border ware sherd, and these have a mean weight of 6gm.

The most likely interpretation of the pottery in these deposits is that they represent rubbish deposited on the site, perhaps night soil used as manure. This activity seems to have started in the early to mid 13th century and continued into the later 13th century. Alternatively, all the earlier pottery might have been deposited at a single point in time, when Bristol medieval wares had started to be produced but before they replaced Ham Green ware. Such an event might be dated to the middle of the 13th century.

The 14th-century Bristol medieval ware waste probably entered the site at a single point in time and the way in which it was subsequently spread into earlier and later deposits indicates the amount of horticultural activity on the site. There is then a hiatus during which no pottery was deposited followed by more pottery deposition in the later 16th to mid 17th century.

Source of pottery

Although, by and large, the relative proportions of the various wares found is typical of Bristol as a whole, there does appear to be a small proportion of pottery from the east of Bristol, which includes types which are not present in the BPT type series. This might reflect the position of the site to the east of the city and north of the Avon.

The small quantity of early post-medieval pottery includes a high proportion of non-local wares, but this may be a reflection of the role of Bristol at that time as a provincial centre with trading connections and a large inland hinterland.

The 14th-century waste sherds are very similar to those from St Peter's church (Dawson and Ponsford 1972) and it may be that both groups of waste come from the same production site.

Further work

No further work is recommended on this pottery at this time, although in the future it would be worthwhile comparing the fabric of the wasters with that of other groups of waste from the city. Therefore, the collection should be retained, in its entirety, for possible future study.

Bibliography

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Table 2. Correlation of Common Name codes (cname) and Bristol BPT numbers.

cname	earliest date	latest date	Bristol BPT
BATHA	1050	1350	BPT 46;BPT 73;BPT 134
BORDG	1550	1750	None?
BOXB	1050	1150	None?
BR	1275	1500	BPT 67;BPT 67A;BPT 68;BPT 72;BPT 74;BPT 85;BPT 103;BPT 117;BPT 118;BPT 120;BPT 123;BPT 125;BPT 126;BPT 154;BPT 166;BPT 208;BPT 230;BPT 242;BPT 247;BPT 294;BPT 316;BPT 324;BPT 357
HG	1150	1250	BPT 26;BPT 27;BPT65;BPT 241;BPT 248
HGR	1150	1250	BPT 32;BPT 48;BPT 65
MEDLOC	1150	1350	None?
MINETY	1100	1550	BPT 18;BPT 18E (HM);BPT 84 (WT);BPT 145
NH	1250	1500	None?
SAIP	1280	1500	BPT 232
SAIU	1250	1550	BPT 160
SSOM	1550	1900	BPT 96;BPT 220;BPT 268;BPT 274;BPT 334
STRE	1630	1750	BPT 109
TGW	1640	1770	BPT 99

Table 3. List of recorded pottery

Context	cname	Form	Nosh	NoV	Description	Part	Weight	Use	Condition
463	BR	JUG	1	1	CUGL INT AND EXT	BS	6		WARPED AND OVERFIRED
463	BR	JAR/DISH	1	1	FLAT BASE;INT PLAIN GL	B	7		CLAY FUSED TO GLAZE
463	BR	JUG	6	6	CUGL EXT	BS	31		CLAY FUSED TO GLAZE
463	BR	JUG	1	1	FLAT BASE;CUGL EXT	B	16		CLAY FUSED TO GLAZE
463	BATHA	JAR	1	1		BS	4	SOOTED EXT	
463	BR	JAR	1	1	INT PLAIN GL	BS	26		
463	BR	RIDGE	1	1		BS	5		
463	BR	AQUAMANILE	1	1	WT BODY;APPLIED PIECES;CUGL INT AND EXT	BS	33		
463	BR	JUG	13	13	CUGL EXT	BS	62		
463	BR	JAR	1	1	CUGL DRIBBLES INT AND EXT	BS	5		
463	BR	JAR	1	1	INT CUGL	BS	4		
463	BR	JUG	1	1	HORIZ RED CLAY STRIP;PLAIN EXT GL	BS	3		
463	BR	CON	2	2	UNGLAZED	BS	11		
463	BR	JUG	1	1	PLAIN STRAP HANDLE;PLAIN GL	H	12		
463	BR	BAL/CON	1	1	CUGL EXT	BS	8		
463	BR	JUG	1	1	VERTICAL RED CLAY STRIPS;SELF COLOURED APPLIED PELLET AT TOP OF RED STRIP;DEVOLVED COLLAR RIM	R	18		
463	BR	JUG	1	1	APPLIED RED CLAY STRIPS IN CURVILINEAR PATTERN;EXT AND INT PLAIN GL	BS	10		
463	BR	JUG	2	2	CUGL INT AND EXT	BS	7		

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Context	cname	Form	Nosh	NoV	Description	Part	Weight	Use	Condition
463	BR	JUG	1	1	BRIDGE SPOUT;PLAIN GL	BS	9		
463	BR	JUG	1	1	PLAIN STRAP 42MM WIDE; TWO THUMB IMPRESSIONS AT B/H;EXT CUGL	BS	52		
463	BR	JUG	1	1		BS	24		
463	BR	JUG	1	1	STRAP HANDLE WITH VERTICAL LINES DOWN BACK;CUGL	H	4		
463	HGR	JAR	1	1		B	17	SOOTED EXT	
463	MINETY	TP	1	1	WIDE STRAP;R/H SLASHED INT;DIAG SLASHES DOWN HANDLE	R;H	57		
463	MINETY	JUG	1	1	WT;EXT PLAIN GL	BS	3	LEACHED INT	
463	MINETY	JAR	1	1	HM;UNGLAZED	BS	9	SOOTED EXT	
463	MINETY	TP	1	1	HM;EXT PLAIN GL	BS	7	LEACHED INT	
463	NH	JAR	1	1	HM?	BS	5	SOOTED EXT	
463	SAIP	CHAF	1	1	APPLIED MOULDED "SUN FACE";ALTERNATING LIGHT BROWN AND GREEN GLAZE;STABBED INT AND EXT	R	40		
463	SAIU	JUG	1	1		BS	3		
463	SSOM	JUG	1	1	HORIZ GROOVES	BS	3		
463	SSOM	BOWL	1	1	INT GL	B	5		
463	SSOM	BOWL	1	1	BEAD RIM;TWO WIDE GROOVES BELOW RIM;INT GL	R	35		
463	STRE	TANK	1	1	CYLINDRICAL RIBBED;BLACK GLAZE INT AND EXT	B	22		
463	TGW	CHAR	1	1	LEAD-BACKED;WIDE BLUE LINES AND NARROW PURPLE LINES	BS	7		
468	MINETY	JAR	1	1	INT GL;HM	BS	5		
484	BR	JUG	1	1	HORIZ THUMBED RED CLAY STRIP AT NECK;PLAIN EXT GL	BS	10		
484	BR	JUG	1	1	PLAIN EXT GL	BS	6		

Context	cname	Form	Nosh	NoV	Description	Part	Weight	Use	Condition
484	BR	JUG	1	1	PLAIN EXT GL	BS	1		
487	HGR	JAR	1	1		BS	2	SOOTED EXT	
488	BR	DRIP?	1	1	SANDED BASE	BS	2		WASTE?
488	BR	JUG	4	4	CUGL	BS	19		BURNT CLAY FUSED TO GLAZE?
488	BR	JAR/DISH	1	1	INT CUGL	BS	3		BURNT CLAY FUSED TO GLAZE?
488	BATHA	JAR	2	1	LCCHERT;GSQ	BS	7	SOOTED EXT	
488	BOXB	JAR	1	1		BS	3	KETTLE FUR INT	ABR
488	BR	JUG	1	1	INT AND EXT PLAIN GL;APPLIED HAND AND ARM (SELF-COLOURED);APPLIED BROOCH? (RED CLAY);FORM CONICAL?	BS	17		
488	BR	JUG	1	1	CUGL	BS	5		
488	BR	JUG	1	1	STRAP HANDLE;CENTRAL LINE OF DIAG SLASHES BETWEEN VERTICAL LINES;CUGL	H	8		
488	BR	JUG	1	1	FLAT BASE;CUGL SPOTS EXT	BS	13		
488	BR	JUG	10	10	CUGL EXT	BS	38		
488	BR	DISH	1	1	CUGL INT;FLAT-TOPPED RIM	PROF	13		
488	BR	RIDGE	2	2	CUGL	BS	15		
488	HG	JUG	1	1	HORIZ COMBED LINES;PLAIN EXT GL	BS	15		
488	HG	JUG	1	1	PLAIN EXT GL	BS	10		
488	HGR	JAR	1	1		B	10	BLACK DEPO INT	
488	HGR	JAR	1	1		BS	45	BLACK DEPO INT	
488	HGR	JAR	1	1	EVERTED RIM	R	30		
488	HGR	JAR	3	3		BS	46	SOOTED EXT	
488	HGR	JAR	1	1	HORIZ COMBED LINES	BS	6		
488	HGR	JAR	3	3	HORIZ COMBED LINES	BS	26		
488	MINETY	JAR	1	1	HM;PLAIN GL INT	BS	12	LEACHED INT;SOOTED EXT	

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Context	cname	Form	Nosh	NoV	Description	Part	Weight	Use	Condition
488	MINETY	JAR	1	1	HM;DIAG COMBED LINE	BS	20	LEACHED INT;SOOTED EXT	
490	BR	JUG	2	2	CUGL EXT	BS	5		
492	BR	JUG	1	1	CUGL EXT;BRIDGE SPOUT;DEVOLVED COLLAR RIM	R	13		
492	BR	JUG	1	1	APPLIED VERT RED CLAY STRIP;INT AND EXT PLAIN GL	BS	3		
492	BR	JAR	1	1	UNGLAZED	BS	4		
492	BR	JUG	1	1	CUGL EXT	BS	4		
493	BR	JUG	1	1	PLAIN EXT GL	BS	2		
494	BR	JUG	1	1	PLAIN EXT GL;HORIZ GROOVES ON SHOULDER	BS	12		
500	MINETY	TP	1	1		BS	3		CLAY FUSED TO GLAZE;GLAZE OVER BREAKS
500	SSOM	JAR	1	1	INT GL	BS	2	SOOTED EXT	
516	BR	JUG	1	1	PLAIN STRAP 34MM WIDE;CUGL	H	23		WASTE
516	BR	JUG	1	1	PLAIN STRAP;CUGL	BS	10		WASTE
516	BR	JUG	3	3	EXT CUGL	BS	33		WASTE
516	BR	RIDGE	1	1		BS	8		
516	BR	JUG	1	1	CLOSE-SET HORIZ GROOVES;CUGL	BS	6		
516	BR	JUG	1	1	EXT PLAIN GL	BS	2		
520	BR	JUG	2	2	INT AND EXT CUGL	BS	11		WASTE
520	BR	JUG	2	2	EXT CUGL	BS	5		WASTE
520	BR	JAR	1	1	INT CUGL	BS	3		
520	HGR	JAR	1	1	SMALL VESSEL;EVERTED RIM;WAVY LINE ON SHOULDER	R	13	SOOTED EXT	
523	BORDG	JAR	1	1	CYLINDRICAL VESSEL;INT CUGL	BS	2		
523	BR	JUG	1	1	STRAP HANDLE;CENTRAL LINE OF	H	11		

Context	cname	Form	Nosh	NoV	Description	Part	Weight	Use	Condition
					STABS;CUGL				
523	HG	JUG	1	1	PLAIN GL	BS	8		
524	BATHA	JAR	1	1		BS	7	SOOTED EXT	
524	BR	RIDGE	1	1	CUGL	BS	13		
524	HG	JUG	1	1		BS	18		
524	HGR	JAR	1	1		BS	10	KETTLE FUR INT	
524	HGR	JAR	1	1	EVERTED EXT BEAD RIM	R	16		
524	HGR	JAR	1	1	HORIZ COMBING	BS	9		
525	BR	JUG	1	1	CUGL EXT	BS	6		WARPED;OVERFIRED;CLAY FUSED TO GLAZE
525	BATHA	JAR	1	1		BS	2		
525	BR	JUG	1	1	THUMBED BASE	B	7		
525	BR	JUG	4	4	PLAIN EXT GL	BS	10		
525	BR	RIDGE	1	1	CUGL	BS	12		
525	HG	JUG	1	1		BS	3		
525	HGR	JAR	2	2		BS	14	SOOTED EXT	
525	MINETY	JAR	2	1	WT;UNGLAZED	BS	5	SOOTED EXT;INT LEACHED	
602	BR	JUG	1	1	INT AND EXT CUGL	BS	2		
602	BR	JUG	1	1	FLAT BASE	BS	6		
602	BR	JUG	1	1	CUGL EXT	BS	4		
602	MEDLOC	JUG	1	1	CUGL EXT	BS	5		
607	HG	JUG	1	1		BS	7		