

# Identification and Assessment of Selected Pottery and Ceramic Building Material from the Old Council House, Bristol (BRSMG 2005/06)

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Fragments of 9 pottery vessels and a ceramic roof tile from excavations at the Old Council House, Bristol, were submitted for identification and assessment. The pottery includes vessels of late 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century date, most of which are of types already recorded from Bristol. However, two of these sherds are of unusual types and merit further investigation. In addition, two sherds from a flanged tile of 12<sup>th</sup> to early 13<sup>th</sup> century date were submitted. This type is not known to the author from Bristol and denotes the presence of a major 12<sup>th</sup> century structure on or near the site. This too merits further study.

## Description

### **Ceramic Building Material**

Two sherds from a flanged roof tile were submitted (context 501). The fabric, which is oxidized with reduced surfaces and splashes of plain glaze, contains abundant subangular quartz sand and moderate calcareous inclusions.

Flanged tiles of this type were used in the same way as Roman *tegulae* and *imbrex* tiles and appear throughout the country, from Yorkshire to Sussex and the Welsh borderland to the east coast, during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest finds come from high status religious sites, such as Reading and Battle Abbeys, but are found soon after in urban deposits, although in no case known to the author is the identity of the structures on which these urban finds were made known (Armitage et al. 1981; Lewis 1987). In the west country examples are known from Kilpeck, where it is suggested that they were used on the parish church roof, and from a site at Bewell House, Hereford. Extensive collections from Gloucester and from Tewkesbury Abbey have not produced any examples.

### **Pottery**

#### A Wiltshire/Somerset coarseware

Two sherds, possibly from the same vessel, of a coarse handmade ware were submitted (contexts 497 and 502). At x20 magnification inclusions of polished rounded quartz, bivalve shell, and thin-walled freshwater or land mollusc were present. The groundmass appears to be calcareous but is otherwise devoid of visible inclusions.

The presence of the polished rounded quartz indicates that the sand temper is in part at least derived from lower Cretaceous sands. Such grains are common in superficial sands in

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western Wiltshire and south Somerset, following the outcrop of Lower Cretaceous sand-bearing deposits. In Wiltshire, clays with these inclusions usually contain abundant quartz and muscovite silt, derived from the Gault clay (Bath Fabric A, Vince 1984), whilst in south Somerset where inclusionless bodies such as that of these two sherds are the norm but the vessels invariably contain fragments of Cretaceous chert (South Western Chert-tempered ware, SWCHT, ). This fabric is clearly different from both of these two groups, although is classed here as a variant of the Bath A fabric (Bristol Fabrics BPT 46; BPT 73; and BPT 134).

#### Bristol C ware

Two examples classed here as variants of Bristol C ware were submitted (Vince 1991; Vince 1984; contexts 500 and 501). This ware typically contains moderate fragments of Lower Carboniferous limestone and was presumably produced from clays developed on weathered outcrops of Carboniferous limestone in the Bristol area. However, in these two examples rounded quartz and fragments of sandstone are also present. The source of these inclusions cannot be determined without thin section analysis but suggests that in these cases the source material is more variable and may include detrital sand. Various examples of similar wares are present in the Bristol Fabric series: BPT 2; BPT 10; BPT 194; BPT 309.

#### Surrey Whitewares

Two sherds of Surrey whiteware were submitted. One of these comes from a Coarse Border Ware vessel, probably a lobed cup, with bichrome glazes (context 467). The internal glaze is an amber colour and the external glaze is a green mottled clay coloured by the addition of copper. An elaborate example of a Coarse Border Ware vessel with similar glaze found in London is illustrated by Pearce & Vince (Pearce and Vince 1988:64, No.34). Similar vessels were being produced at various sites in the Farnham area of Surrey and waste is known from Farnborough Hill.

The second sherd comes from an early Border ware vessel (Pearce 1992; 445), distinguished from visually similar French whitewares by its abundant fine quartz sand (c.0.05-0.15mm), visible at x20 magnification. This vessel too has bichrome glaze, but with the copper-mottled glaze on the interior and plain yellow glaze on the exterior. The sherd is too small to reconstruct the profile of the vessel since by the 16<sup>th</sup> century a wide range of forms was being produced in the Surrey/Hampshire border.

Neither of these two wares is present in the Bristol fabric series, although Tudor Green ware, another Surrey/Hampshire border product, is represented (BPT 182).

#### Langewehe Stoneware

Two joining sherds of a small Langewehe stoneware jug were submitted (context 444). They form the rim to neck of the vessel and can be paralleled by a vessel in the van Beuningen collection (Hurst, Neal, and van Beuningen 1986, Fig.91, No.275, classed by Hurst as Small

Type IV Jug). This type is dated by Hurst to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, although similar vessels are known from London in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. No example of this ware is present in the Bristol fabric series.

#### South-East Wiltshire coarseware

A body sherd from a South-East Wiltshire handmade jar was submitted (context 503). This vessel has a roughened exterior surface, "scratch-marked". Such vessels were introduced to southeast Wiltshire in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century but were produced into the early 13<sup>th</sup> century (as at Laverstock, Musty and Ewence 1969). Such vessels occur in small quantities in Bristol, alongside the glazed tripod pitchers and jugs which were made alongside them (Bristol Fabrics BPT 17; BPT 18C; BPT 249; and BPT 363)

#### Siegburg Stoneware

The shoulder and body of a Siegburg stoneware jug of Jakobakanne form was submitted (context 450). The neck of the vessel was missing and the rough edge was coated with mortar. Hurst illustrates a similar vessel from the van Beuningen collection, which he dates to the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Hurst, Neal, and van Beuningen 1986, 88, No.263). The Jakobakanne form is discussed by Gaimster who concludes on the basis of coin-dated vessels from across western Europe and Scandinavia date to the last quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> and first quarter of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Gaimster 1997, 117-8, 169-70). No example of this ware is present in the Bristol fabric series.

#### Assessment

The flanged roof tile is interesting as the first example of this type of roofing known to the author from Bristol. It indicates the presence nearby of an important structure, perhaps a church but perhaps a civic structure or private dwelling. The fabric should be examined using thin section and chemical analysis to determine whether it was locally made or imported from outside the region. This analysis would further knowledge of the spread of this high status roofing tradition in 12<sup>th</sup>- to early 13<sup>th</sup>-century England.

The two sherds of Wiltshire/Somerset coarseware are interesting since they are clearly not local Avon valley products but also do not come from the known sources of such wares. Their analysis would add to knowledge of the trading connections of the early medieval town.

The remaining wares are all of known types although some are not represented in the Bristol medieval pottery fabric collection. These sherds, or other examples of the same type, should be added to the fabric series.

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