

Assessment of the pottery from Billet Street, Taunton, Somerset (BST06)

Alan Vince

A moderate collection of pottery from excavations carried out by Foundations Archaeology at Billet Street, Taunton, was submitted for identification and assessment.

Description

Ceramic Building Material

Fragments of glazed ridge tiles and handmade red earthenware bricks were recovered.

The ridge tiles were all examined at x20 magnification and have a variety of different fabrics. There are ten fragments in total. Two are probably of Bristol manufacture and have a quartz sandstone moulding sand and contain rounded fragments of white mudstone. Tiles of this type were traded over a wide area around the Bristol Channel from the late 13th to the 15th centuries. Two are probably Exeter Fabric 40 (EX40), a ware produced first in the early 13th century but continuing into the 14th century (Allan 1984). One is probably a Nether Stowey product, since it contains fragments of slate which may originate in the Quantock Hills (Nether Stowey is documented as a source of bricks in the 17th century, VCH 1992). Finally, two fragments of ridge tile of South Somerset ware were present. Since this industry was in operation from the 13th century until the 19th century these tiles cannot be closely dated (Coleman-Smith & Pearson 1988, 319-23).

The bricks, also examined at x20 magnification, all have the same fabric, containing moderate fragments of rounded quartz and chert. This fabric suggests that they were locally-made since chert and quartz gravels occur to the south of Taunton. Bricks were probably not used in this part of Somerset until the later 16th century, owing to the wide availability of building stone, and may owe their introduction here to the adoption of chimneys in later 16th century domestic buildings. By the late 17th century the brick industry of Bridgewater, utilising marine muds, was underway and this may provide a terminus ante quem for these bricks.

Clay Tobacco Pipes

Three fragments of clay pipe stem were recovered. Two have bore diameters which suggest a mid 17th century or earlier date and one has a narrower bore diameter, typical of 18th and 19th century pipes.

Glass

Four fragments of glass were recovered.

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That from context 1024 is the bowl of a stemmed wine glass in a clear glass. The weight of the fragment suggests that it is a lead glass and therefore of late 17th century or later date whilst the crudeness of the manufacture suggests an earlier date.

Those from context 1054 are fragments of tall dark green wine bottles of mid 18th to 19th century date.

That from context 1018 is the rim of a small jar in a weathered light blue glass. The rim is similar to that found on urinals but the body appears to be too bulbous for these vessels, which have a long narrow neck. Vessels with a light blue, as opposed to a light green tinge first appear in the west country in the mid 17th century.

Pottery

Medieval

Twenty-two sherds of medieval pottery were recovered. Most are small sherds and include some abraded examples. It is likely, therefore, that some at least of these sherds have had a long post-depositional history.

The earliest type is chert-tempered ware (SWCHT). A spouted bowl of this type containing a hoard of mid 11th-century pennies was found at Wedmore (Rahtz 1974) and vessels of very similar fabric were still in use in Exeter and Launceston Castle into the mid 13th century (Allan 1984; Brown et al. 2006). All of the sherds from Billet Street come from handmade jars with no sign of decoration (which is more common on 11th and 12th-century examples).

A sherd of South East Wiltshire ware (SEW) comes from a jar. Such jars were produced from the late 11th to the mid 13th centuries and wasters have been found at Laverstock in the mid 13th century (Musty and Ewence 1969).

The remaining wares could all be of 13th or 14th century date: six sherds of Exeter 40 jugs and one jar in the same fabric; two sherds of probable Nether Stowey jugs, with thumbled bases, both containing large rounded fragments of slate; two sherds of South Somerset ware of medieval character (SSOM MED); and a unusual green-glazed whiteware vessel. The latter appears to be the cordoned base of a cylindrical vessel decorated with plastic decoration. The fabric is reminiscent of North French Monochrome ware, and may be a product of the Lower Seine valley (i.e. Rouen or its hinterland). The identification could be confirmed by further analysis.

Post-Medieval

Forty-one sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered. Most of these (36 sherds) are of South Somerset ware. Of these, the majority are internally-glazed bowl fragments, an undiagnostic form produced from the later 16th to the 19th centuries. However, wherever decoration or typological features occur they mostly appear to be of early to mid 17th century date. These include jugs with bands of white slip on the shoulder which was then decorated

with crude sgraffito wavy lines, a mid 17th-century type, and a pancheon with a distinctive lid-seated rim form (Coleman-Smith & Pearson 1988, Fig 121 Nos. 12-36-38).

The earliest example is a sherd from context 1030 which is from a 16th-century jug with an applied strip around the rim (1988, Fig.61).

The five remaining sherds are of imported or non-local wares. The earliest of these is the handle of a Raeren stoneware mug of later 15th to mid 16th century date (Hurst, Neal, and van Beuningen 1986, 194-8, Fig 94). Two sherds from a Frechen stoneware mug with a tall neck were recorded. They either come from a vessel Hurst's Plain Narrow Globular Jugs (late 16th century) or Plain Ovoid Jug (early 17th century), Hurst, Neal, and van Beuningen 1986, 216-7).

A bodysherd of a Martincamp flask of Hurst's type III (Hurst, Neal, and van Beuningen 1986, 103-4, Fig 47 No.143) probably dates to the mid 17th century.

The remaining sherds are either of Bristol or Staffordshire origin. They consist of one small sherd of a yellow-glazed hollow ware, probably a slipware posset pot (STSL) and a bodysherd of a white salt-glazed stoneware tankard with a fine white slip over a coarser buff body. This type was produced for a short period in the early 18th century (Edwards & Hampson 2005, 20-25).

Wood

A possible fragment of a burnt wooden cup was recovered. It is an unstratified find and is now completely carbonised.

Assessment

Stratigraphy

Most of the finds come from the fills of features which cut through the natural strata. Some of these were only visible on removal of subsoil (Phase 1) and others were seen on removal of the topsoil (Phase 2).

Only two features in Phase 1 produced any of the finds reported on here. They are interpreted as tree holes (1005 and 1009) and produced a sherd of chert-tempered jar and a sherd of Exeter 40 jug. Both are small sherds and could easily be residual. They date the filling of these features to the 13th century or later.

Phase 2 features include three postholes, 1011, 1013 and 1015, which produced sherds of medieval pottery. However, 1015 also produced a fragment of brick. This suggests either that the brick is of medieval date, which is unlikely in Taunton, or that the pottery is residual and the post-holes are of post-medieval date. The other definite Phase 2 features are of post-medieval date. Pit 1057 contains a group of late 16th to mid 17th century pottery and a fragment of brick. Pit 1053 produced a mixed assemblage in which the latest finds are two

fragments of tall dark green glass bottle. This dates the backfill of the pit to the mid 18th century or later. Other finds from the same feature date to the medieval period, the late 16th/17th century and the early 18th century.

Other features on the site, with an indeterminate relationship to the subsoil, all contain late 16th to mid 17th-century finds, sometimes together with medieval pottery. They consist of two ditches (1029 and 1033); two pits (1017 and 1045); two possible tree holes (1023 and 1035) and a possible pit, 1039.

Interpretation

The first signs of human activity on the site consist of the medieval pottery. As a group, this pottery dates to the early to mid 13th century, although it is possible that earlier sherds are present. The low quantity of medieval South Somerset ware suggests that there is little late 13th to 15th-century activity. The size and condition of the sherds suggests that the sherds may have been present in a horticultural horizon. The next signs of activity come in the later 16th century and the majority of finds date between the mid 16th and the mid 17th centuries, with a few later types. The finds of brick associated with mid 16th to mid 17th century finds suggest that a structure nearby had brick elements, perhaps just a chimney stack rather than brick walls. The variety of ridge tiles, some of which are of medieval date and others early post-medieval date, might indicate the reuse of various ridge tiles in the early post-medieval period, which might in turn suggest a fairly low status. However, the collection includes three sherds from imported vessels of mid 16th to mid 17th century date and this probably indicates that the occupants were not at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This activity seems to have ceased by the later 17th century (otherwise the collection should contain South Somerset ware slipwares) and the latest feature, the mid 18th century or later Pit 1053, appears not to contain much contemporary refuse, suggesting that the site was not occupied at that time.

Further Work

The sherd of possible North French Monochrome ware is an unusual find and of a form which is not precisely paralleled, in the author's experience. It therefore deserves to be illustrated and its source tested by thin section and chemical analysis. At 2007-8 rates, this work would cost £100 plus VAT, including the production of a report.

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Appendix 1 Catalogue of Finds

Context	context group	class	period	phase	Action	cname	subfabric	Form	Description	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	ASW	Condition	Use	L	B	TH
US		POTTERY	US	US		SSOM		JUG	BAND OF WHITE SLIP ON SHOULDER; SPOTS OF CU IN PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	3	3					
US		POTTERY	US	US	DR;TS;ICPS	NFM		JUG	CORDONNED BASE; APPLIED ROD; CU GL INT AND EXT	B	1	1	22	22					
US		POTTERY	US	US		SSOM		JUG	STRAP HANDLE; PLAIN GL	R;H	1	1	37	37					
US		POTTERY	US	US		MTIL	SST/CARB CHERT SAND	RIDGE	PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	13	13					
US		POTTERY	US	US		SWCHT	FINE GROUNDMASS	JAR		R	1	1	10	10					
US		POTTERY	US	US		SSOM	CHERT-TEMPERED	JAR		BS	1	1	5	5					
US		WOOD	US	US		WOOD		BOWL		R	1	1	2	2	CARBONISED				
US		CTP	US	US		PIPECLAY		PIPE	EM17TH BORE	BS	1	1	3	3					
US		CTP	US	US		PIPECLAY		PIPE	18TH/19TH BORE	BS	1	1	1	1					
1006	PIT/ROOT BALL SCAR 1005	POTTERY	SN-MED	1		SWCHT	FINE GROUNDMASS	JAR	HM?	B	1	1	15	15		WHITE DEPO INT; SOOTED EXT			
1010	PIT/ROOT BALL SCAR 1009	POTTERY	MED	1		EX40		JUG	PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	2	2					
1012	PH 1011	POTTERY	MED	2		NETHER STOWEY	SLATE/PHYLLITE	JUG	THUMBED BASE	B	1	1	5	5					
1012	PH 1011	POTTERY	MED	2		EX40		JUG	THUMBED BASE	B	1	1	4	4					
1012	PH 1011	POTTERY	MED	2		EX40		JAR	BROWN SLIP?; LID-SEATED RIM	R	1	1	3	3					

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1014	PH 1013	POTTERY	MED	2		EX40	JUG	PLAIN EXT GL	BS	1	1	1	1	ABR
1016	PH 1015	POTTERY	MED	2		SSOM MED	JAR		BS	1	1	12	12	
1016	PH 1015	POTTERY	MED	2		EX40	JUG	EXT PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	3	3	
1016	PH 1015	POTTERY	MED	2		EX40	JUG	EXT PLAIN GL;HAMMERSCALE IN APPLIED STRIP	BS	1	1	2	2	
1016	PH 1015	CBM	MED	2		PMTIL	S CHERT;S RQ	BRICK	BS	1	1	56	56	
1018	PIT 1017	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN		SSOM	JAR	INT AND EXT PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	3	3	
1018	PIT 1017	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN		SSOM	JAR/BOWL	INT PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	1	1	
1018	PIT 1017	CBM	EPMED	UNCERTAIN		EX40?	RIDGE	CREST;CUGL	BS	1	1	47	47	
1018	PIT 1017	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN		MART	GREY/RED STONEWARE	FLASK	BS	1	1	3	3	
1018	PIT 1017	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN		NETHER STOWEY	SLATE	JAR	ROUNDED EVERTED RIM	R	1	1	3	3
1018	PIT 1017	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN		SSOM	PANC	E17TH C (COLEMAN-SMITH & PEARSON FIG.121 12/36-8)	R	1	1	33	33	SOOTED EXT
1018	PIT 1017	PMGL	EPMED	UNCERTAIN		PMGL	LTBL	JAR	ROLLED-OUT RIM C.50MM DIAM	R	1	1	3	3
1024	PIT/ROOT BALL SCAR 1023	PMGL	PMED	UNCERTAIN		PMGL	CLEAR	WINE GLASS	BS	1	1	7	7	
1030	DITCH 1029	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN		SWCHT	FINE GROUNDMASS	JAR	B	2	1	26	13	
1030	DITCH 1029	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN		SWCHT	FINE GROUNDMASS	JAR	BS	2	2	6	3	
1030	DITCH 1029	CBM	EPMED	UNCERTAIN		BR	RIDGE	CUGL	BS	1	1	1	1	
1030	DITCH 1029	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN		SSOM	JUG	EVERTED RIM;PLAIN INT AND EXT GL;APPLIED THUMBED STRIP AROUND RIM	R	1	1	15	15	
1034	DITCH	POTTERY	PMED	UNCERTAIN		SWCHT	FINE	JAR	BS	1	1	7	7	

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ID	Location	Material	Category	Condition	Soil	Notes	Shape	Color	Texture	Count	Weight	Volume	Other	
1033						GROUNDMASS								
1034	DITCH 1033	POTTERY	PMED	UNCERTAIN	SSOM	SILTY MICACEOUS;LIGHT LAMINAE	JAR		BS	1	1	9	9	
1036	PIT/ROOT BALL SCAR 1035	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	SSOM	SILTY MICACEOUS;LIGHT LAMINAE	JUG	WAVY SCGR THROUGH WHITE SLIP;EXT PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	7	7	
1036	PIT/ROOT BALL SCAR 1035	CBM	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	NETHER STOWEY	SLATE FRAGS	RIDGE	PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	31	31	
1040	POSSIBLE PIT 1039	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	SEW		JAR		BS	1	1	6	6	
1040	POSSIBLE PIT 1039	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	SWCHT	FINE GROUNDMASS	JAR		BS	1	1	1	1	
1040	POSSIBLE PIT 1039	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	SSOM		JUG	EXT BROWN SLIP;PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	2	2	
1046	PIT 1045	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	SSOM	SILTY MICACEOUS;LIGHT LAMINAE	JUG	FOOTRING;EXT PLAIN GL	B	1	1	65	65	
1046	PIT 1045	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	SSOM		JUG	VERT RED STRIP;PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	0.5	0.5	
1047	PIT 1045	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	SWCHT	SILTY GROUNDMASS	JAR		BS	1	1	2	2	SOOTED EXT
1047	PIT 1045	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	SWCHT	FINE GROUNDMASS	JAR		BS	1	1	3	3	
1047	PIT 1045	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	SSOM		JUG	PLAIN BASE;SAGGING BASE; PLAIN EXT GL	B	1	1	65	65	
1047	PIT 1045	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	SSOM		CUP	U-SECTIONED HANDLE	H;BS	1	1	14	14	
1047	PIT 1045	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	SSOM		CUP	PLAIN RIMS CF TUDG/FREC	R	2	2	11	5.5	
1047	PIT 1045	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	SSOM MED		JUG		BS	2	2	7	3.5	
1047	PIT 1045	POTTERY	EPMED	UNCERTAIN	EX40	GSQ	JUG	EXT WHSL;PLAIN EXT GL	BS	1	1	3	3	

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1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	FREC		DJ	TALL NECK	R	2	1	64	32
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	RAER		DJ	HANDLE	H	1	1	8	8
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	STSL		-		BS	1	1	1	1
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SWSG SLIPPED		TANK		BS	1	1	2	2
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		BOWL	WHITE SLIPPED INT UNDER PLAIN GL	BS	2	1	35	17.5
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		JAR		BS	2	2	42	21
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM	LIGHT BODIED	JAR	INT PLAIN GL	BS	2	1	35	17.5
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		JAR	INT PLAIN GL	B	1	1	11	11
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		BOWL		BS	4	4	59	14.75
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		JUG	PLAIN EXT GL	BS	2	2	14	7
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		JUG	BAND OF WHITE SLIP ON SHOULDER	BS	1	1	4	4
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		CUP	EXT PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	1	1
1054	PIT 1053	CBM	PMED	2	PMTIL	S CHERT;S RQ;A GSQ	BRICK		BS	1	1	167	167
1054	PIT 1053	CBM	PMED	2	PMTIL	S CHERT;S RQ	BRICK		BS	1	1	302	302
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		BOWL	INT PLAIN GL	BS	5	5	367	73.4
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		JUG	BROWN INT AND EXT SLIP;PLAIN EXT GL	BS	1	1	10	10
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		JAR	U-SECTIONED HANDLE;WHITE SLIPPED;PLAIN GL	H	1	1	39	39
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		CUP		BS	1	1	3	3
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		CUP	ROD HANDLE	H	1	1	11	11
1054	PIT 1053	CBM	PMED	2	BR		RIDGE	CUGL	BS	1	1	68	68
1054	PIT 1053	CBM	PMED	2	SSOM		RIDGE	PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	24	24
1054	PIT 1053	POTTERY	PMED	2	SSOM		JAR	INT PLAIN GL;EXT WHITE SLIP AND INCISED WAVY LINE DEC	BS	1	1	5	5

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1054	PIT 1053	CTP	PMED	2	PIPECLAY		PIPE	EM17TH BORE	BS	2	2	8	4	
1054	PIT 1053	PMGL	PMED	2	PMGL	BKGR	TALL		BS	2	2	31	15.5	
1058	PIT 1057	POTTERY	EPMED	2	SSOM		BOWL	INT PLAIN GL	B	1	1	70	70	
1058	PIT 1057	POTTERY	EPMED	2	SSOM		JAR	INT PLAIN GL	BS	3	3	18	6	
1058	PIT 1057	POTTERY	EPMED	2	SSOM		JUG	WHITE SLIP EXT;ROUGH SGRAFFITO	BS	1	1	1	1	
1058	PIT 1057	POTTERY	EPMED	2	SSOM		JUG	PLAIN GL OVER RED SLIP EXT	BS	1	1	10	10	
1058	PIT 1057	POTTERY	EPMED	2	SSOM	SILTY MICACEOUS;LIGHT LAMINAE	JUG	PLAIN EXT GL	BS	1	1	15	15	
1058	PIT 1057	CBM	EPMED	2	PMTIL	S CHERT;S RQ	BRICK		BS	5	1	39	7.8	
1058	PIT 1057	CBM	EPMED	2	SSOM?	FINE TEXTURE	RIDGE	SST/RQ MOULDING SAND;PLAIN GL OVER RED SLIP? CF HERB5	BS	1	1	40	40	
1058	PIT 1057	POTTERY	EPMED	2	SWCHT		JAR		BS	1	1	6	6	SOOTED EXT
1058	PIT 1057	POTTERY	EPMED	2	SSOM		JAR	INT PLAIN GL	BS	1	1	9	9	GLAZE SPALLED
1058	PIT 1057	POTTERY	EPMED	2	SSOM	SILTY MICACEOUS;LIGHT LAMINAE	JAR?	UNGLAZED;SHARP SHOULDLER ANGLE	BS	1	1	10	10	