

The Pottery from Glastonbury Abbey.

When I started work at Glastonbury in 1951 I was faced with a large and undistinguished collection of medieval and later pottery and some Romano-British wares, all said to have been found on the site. None of the fragments were allocated to any particular area or level. The medieval pottery was valueless historically and not in my view representative of the wares likely to have been in use in Glastonbury.

The Romano-British collection was curious. It was nearly all terra sigillata with very little coarse ware. This problem was solved by the casual remark of a workman employed before 1939: 'we only kept the red pottery'. But the date range was roughly c. 50 - c. 250; there were no late colour coated wares. I also learnt from casual remarks that much had been found at the west end of the nave above the pre-Conquest church.

Before the RB. pottery could be used as evidence of a pre-Christian sanctuary at Glastonbury or whatever it was necessary to establish its distribution and dating on the site. For three seasons I kept a careful record of all pottery found in pre-Dissolution layers. Each piece was noted as it came out and subsequently cleaned and marked. Most of the sherds came from the fill of foundations, trenches robbed in the 19th century.

the fill of / The pottery from / trenches or layers dating before 1184 was minimal and afforded no useful check on the dating established by historical and architectural evidence. The earliest layers containing the RB. pottery were those levelling up parts of the site during the rebuild after 1184, principally the clay layer 1½ m. thick used to raise the floor of the nave. The conclusion was obvious. The RB. pottery had no original connection with the site of the abbey, but represents a settlement at the source from which the clay was brought. This conclusion was established in 1954 and brought about some modification in the recording system.

The pottery for 1951 and 1952 was cleaned labelled etc under cramped conditions in the Gatehouse. The envelopes in boxes were left there to be put away when space was found. When I returned in 1954 the sherds had been taken out of the unsealed envelopes wrongly replaced and in some cases lost. The collection was valueless unless resorted. I had no time to do this and I have never seen this pottery again. I had all the evidence I needed and there seemed no need to waste time for a display for which there was no provision. I brought the 1954 collection here, but had no time to carry out the time consuming work of cleaning and marking. I am returning it to you unwashed and in the original dirty envelopes recording the provenance.

Subsequently I arranged every few years for two of my helpers to come here for a week, help with the cleaning and marking providing new envelopes where needed. The pottery was then disposed of as agreed with the custodian. I had no further interest.

I expected to finish in 1965 and planned to have a final session with my helpers. Dis aliter visum. The pottery from 1963 and 1964 is here unwashed and unmarked in the original dirty envelopes and is returned to you.

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I ^{am} return ~~XXXX~~ the pottery discovered during the excavations of 1954, 1963 and 1964. The rest of the pottery discovered between 1951 and 1964 has already been dealt with and stored by the Custodian. The sequence of events is outlined in the attached memorandum.

The same memorandum outlines the general results of the excavations concerning the pottery and its significance. The conclusions relating to the Romano-British pottery are of particular importance, as attempts have been made in the past to link this with Joseph of Arimathea, the earliest pieces being more or less contemporary with his dating.

At various times I took pieces of stone, plaster slag, etc. for analysis. These were carefully chosen so that the main deposit always remained in the Gatehouse. The pieces taken were of no intrinsic interest and were regarded as expendable. Some have been expended. But some analyses proved unnecessary and in some cases the sample was too large. I am returning what remains on the chance that you might wish to have further analyses made and that they might serve this purpose. As far as I am concerned these might all be destroyed without loss.

Small objects were normally cleaned at Glastonbury and handed over to the Custodian, after record. A few that required prolonged treatment were brought back here. As they emerged they were identified and returned to the Custodian. A few turned out to be lumps of rust or valueless; these were discarded. The final residue I now return with appropriate identification. They represent small objects of little importance and I do not think any would repay further treatment. None seem of any intrinsic interest, ~~or importance.~~

This completes the tally of objects from the excavations. Plans and records were with two exceptions copied at Glastonbury. The two exceptions were the plan of the east end of the Chapter House excavated before 1939 and the plan of the area of the Abbot's House also pre-1939. These were brought here and copied and returned to the Gatehouse before the end of the excavations in 1964. Both are now known to have been made by Wedlake. The first was also surveyed by a draughtsman from the RCHM (England), but not published; it perished in the wartime move of the Commission. The second would have been surveyed by the same body and arrangements were made for this to be done in the autumn of 1939. Other events supervened. I have this information from Clapham, the then Secretary of the Commission and one of the three Directors of Excavations.



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