

IX

BACK SILVER STREET, DURHAM 1975-6 EXCAVATIONS

John Clipson

I. Introduction

A SMALL scale excavation was conducted on this site (NZ 274 428) during the winter of 1975-6 on behalf of the Department of the Environment and in advance of destruction by a Durham County Council service road scheme. The aim of the excavation was to expose one of the few remaining sections of the "extended" city wall and to investigate the area immediately to the East (fig. 1).

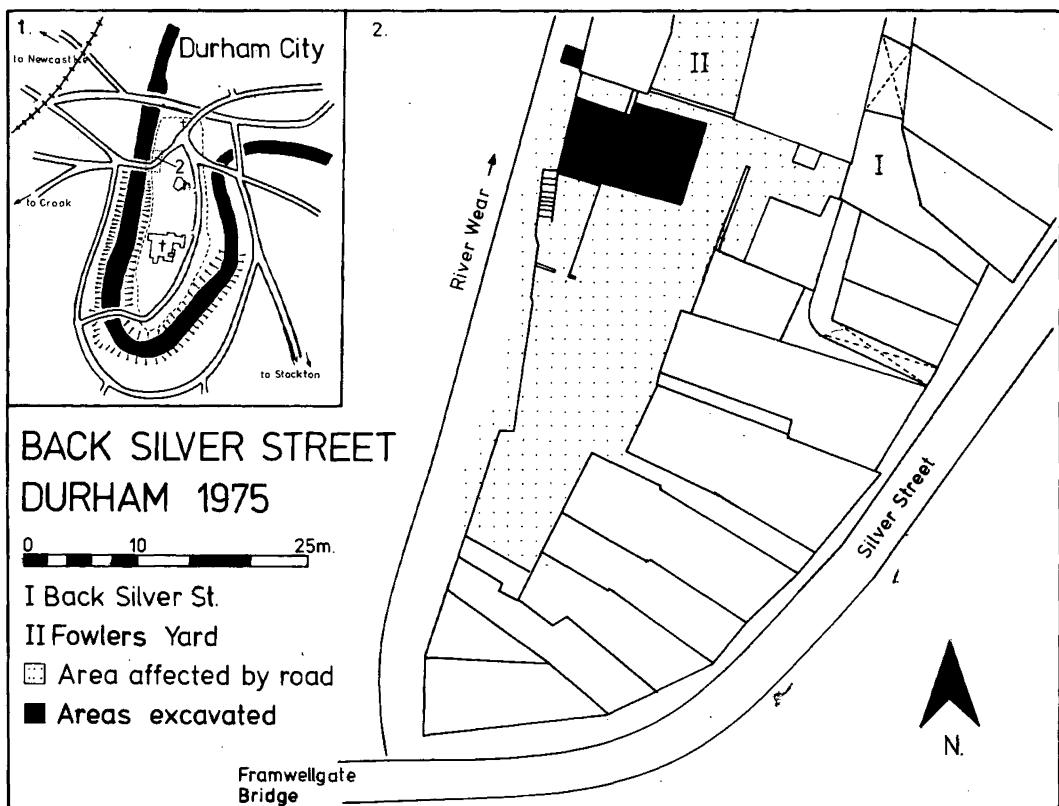


Fig. 1. Location Map

Not all the land to be developed was available for excavation owing to certain legal disputes. A watching brief was, however, maintained on the unexcavated areas during the subsequent building operations. The size of the excavations in the remaining area was further restricted by the proximity of surrounding buildings and the quantity of modern rubble excavated which it was impossible to remove from the site.

The major discoveries of the excavations are described in stratigraphical order starting with the earliest.

II. *Stone drying kiln or oven* (65) fig. 2, pl. II

This mid-thirteenth century structure was located some six metres to the east of the City wall and was constructed of mortar-bonded sandstone blocks, possibly in two separate phases. It was approximately circular, but sloped outwards from a diameter of 1·40 m at the base to 2·50 m at the top. The northern segment of the circle was broken by a 0·50 m wide flue or entrance which extended at least 0·75 m beyond the structure. The flue was not completely excavated because it extended beyond the limits of excavation. To the East of the flue the main wall of the structure stood to a maximum

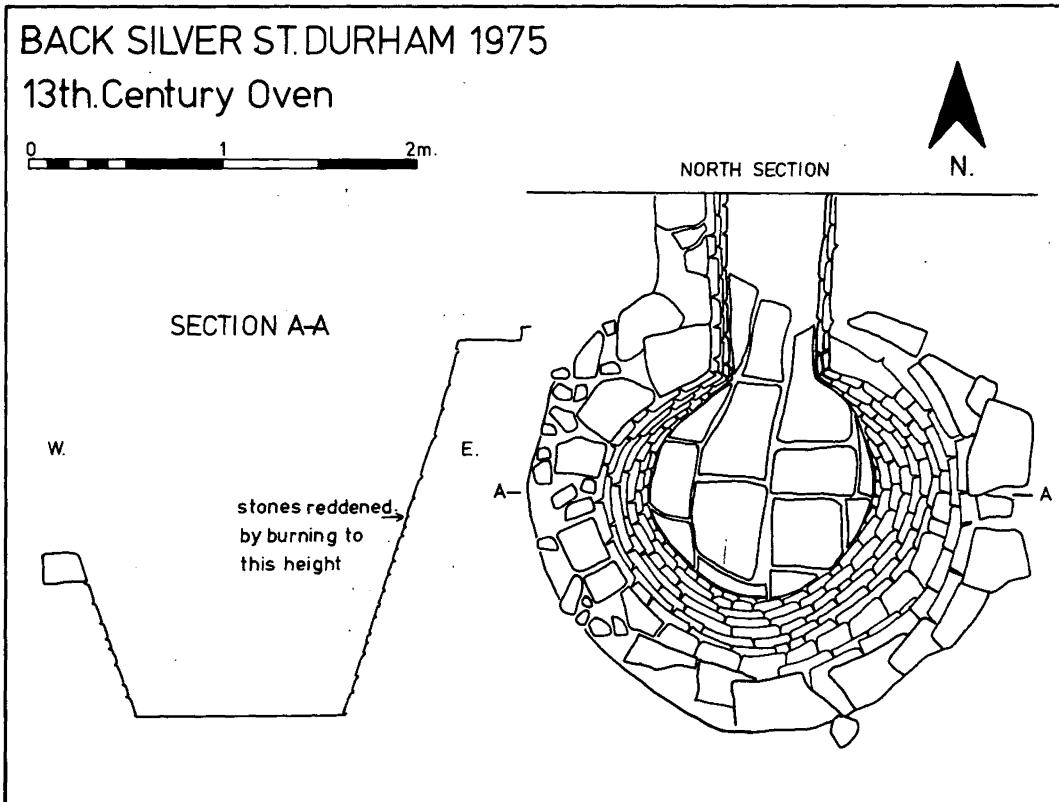


Fig. 2.



Back Silver Street, Durham: drying kiln

height of 2·00 m. The lower 1·25 m of this wall consisted of much smaller stones (10 × 15 cm) than those above (40 × 20 cm). The lower stones were slightly reddened by the effects of heat. Above 1·25 m, there were two courses of long, flat stones overlain by a maximum of four courses of larger, more square-shaped blocks, which only survived on the eastern, uphill, side of the structure and showed no evidence of heat discolouration. Associated with these upper courses was a shallow trench 0·25 m deep × 0·50 m wide following the top perimeter of the wall, and filled with rammed clay and small flat stones standing on end. Whether this represents an original construction trench for the whole structure or a repair trench enabling the insertion of the upper larger blocks was not clear.

Within the structure below the demolition rubble, which included many long, flat, slightly burnt stones and clay, were two layers of charcoal and organic material (see Appendix III). These covered a complex of flatstones, possibly the fallen remains of small stone pillars at the base. In turn those lay over a stone floor consisting of several large flagstones (*c.* 20 × 50 cm) covering all of the base of the structure and extending 0·50 m into the flue.

The presence of a late thirteenth-century medium sized strap-handled jug and the remains of at least ten other vessels of similar date in the demolition rubble gives a *terminus ante quem* for the structure. Sherds from the possible construction trench suggest a mid-thirteenth-century construction date.

Despite the excellent preservation of this structure there was no clear evidence of its original function. Its general shape, the presence of charcoal, and the reddening of the lower courses of stones, all seem to indicate that it was either an oven or drying kiln for grain.

III. *Wall (39) fig. 3, pl. III*

This wall was located running north-south at the extreme western end of the trench and was excavated to a depth of 3·70 m on its inner eastern face, before flooding from the river made further excavation impossible. Two distinct phases were detectable. First the upper, later section standing to a height of 1·00 m, 1·25 m wide, and mortar bonded. This section was built of small irregular sandstone blocks, with facing stones on both sides of the wall, but extant on the inner face only at the northern end. Pottery finds from the construction trench for this phase indicate a sixteenth century date. Flagstones running parallel to the wall level with the bottom of the wall suggest a contemporary walkway.

Secondly, below this construction was a much wider, 1·85 m, more solidly built wall consisting of larger sandstone blocks covering a rubble core. Many repairs and alterations were visible in this phase and the only section surviving reasonably intact was that at the extreme northern end. Here, the facing blocks were approximately 0·50 m long × 0·20 m deep × 0·35 m wide and clay bonded. South of this was a large "bulge" of rubble mortared into the wall and presumably representing some major repair. It was not clear from the excavations whether the wall was cut into the bank, or if it was built freestanding and subsequently soil accumulated behind it.

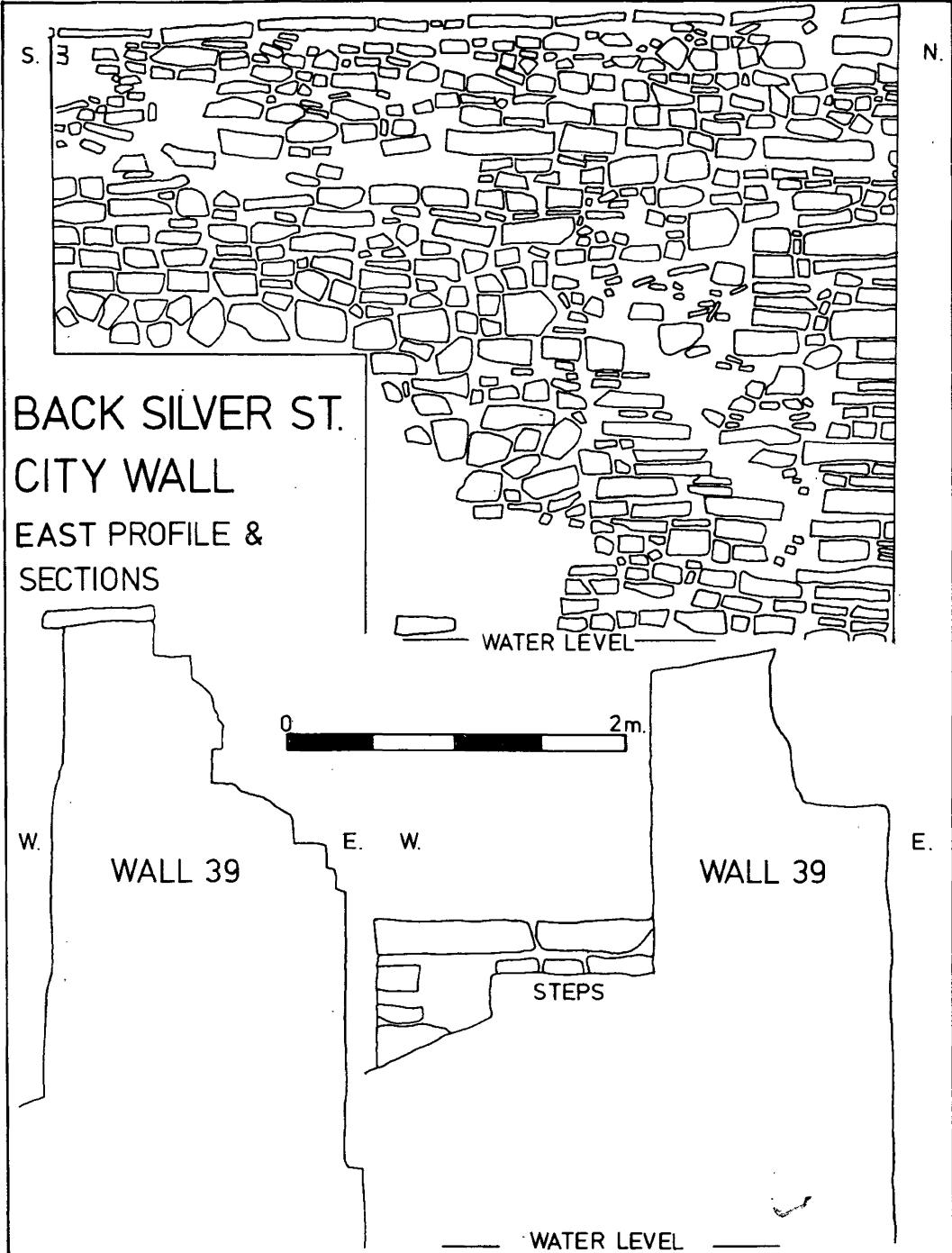


Fig. 3.



Back Silver Street, Durham: wall

This wall, or at least its lower sections is probably the City wall, recorded as being constructed around the lower peninsular in about 1315, after a plea from the citizens of Durham to the Bishop for the erection of walls "for the protection of the merchants and inhabitants from bands of murderers and marauders" (Reg. Polat. Dunelm. Rolls Series ii, 1071). The pottery evidence certainly seems to support this early fourteenth-century construction date.

IV. *Fourteenth–Seventeenth-Century rubbish accumulation*

For the period between the construction of the wall (39) in the early fourteenth century and the construction of a circular brick structure (see below) in the mid-seventeenth century no structural remains were recovered during the excavation. The deposits consisted of up to 2·50 m of good quality brown garden loam containing a rich collection of cooking pots (see Appendix II) and other domestic refuse (see Appendix IV).

V. *Circular brick structure (18) fig. 4a, 4b, pl. IV*

It was only possible to excavate half of this feature as it extended beyond the eastern limit of excavation. The foundation walls were the main surviving structural features. They were located in the bottom of a 0·90 m deep trench and survived to heights varying between 0·10 m and 0·20 m. Foundation construction was of nine by two hand-made bricks (see Appendix V).

Assuming that the unexcavated half was the same as the one excavated, the structure would have been circular, with an overall diameter of 5·50 m. The large number of dutch pantiles found in the robber trench of the foundation wall suggest these were the roofing material and the presence of a 0·40 m × 0·35 m posthole in the centre suggests a central supporting post. Thus one can envisage a round building with brick external walls and a pitched tiled roof, rising to a central support. No evidence was forthcoming of its function. Most of the material contained within it was debris from early nineteenth century clay pipe manufacture. This is clearly later material as shown in the eastern section (fig. 4b) and also by the other finds, evidence which suggests a late seventeenth-/early eighteenth-century construction date.

VI. *Clay pipe manufacture debris*

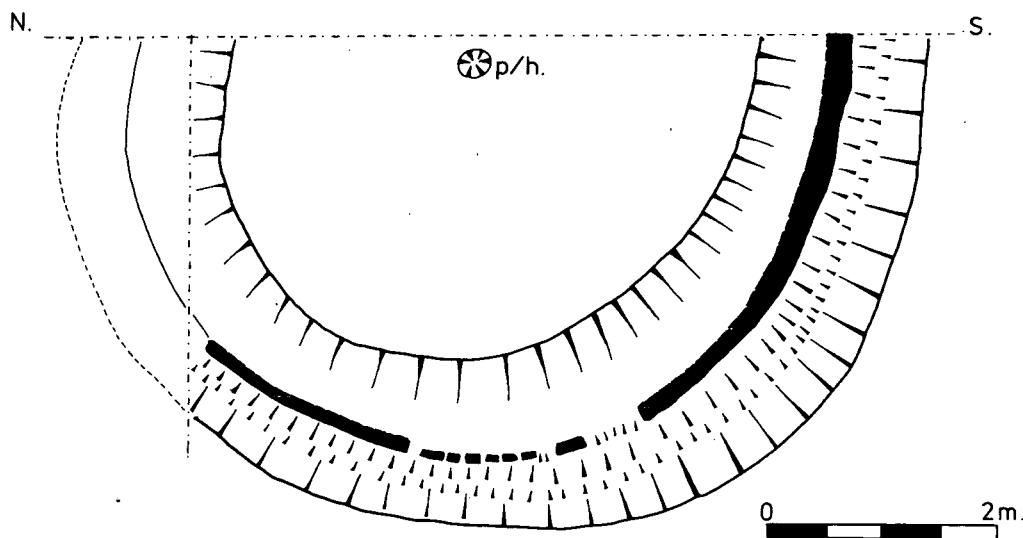
Overlying the demolition material of the circular brick structure was a 0·25 m thick layer of "slag type" material containing large quantities of decorated clay pipes, which have been interpreted (see Appendix I) as the debris from clay pipe manufacture. No structural evidence was found, however, for the location of the kiln.

VII. *Nineteenth-century brick built house*

The concrete floor and brick walls of this building sealed all earlier structures in the eastern half of the site.

BACK SILVER ST. 1975

Late 17th.Century Brick Structure



Eastern Section - showing clay pipe kiln debris

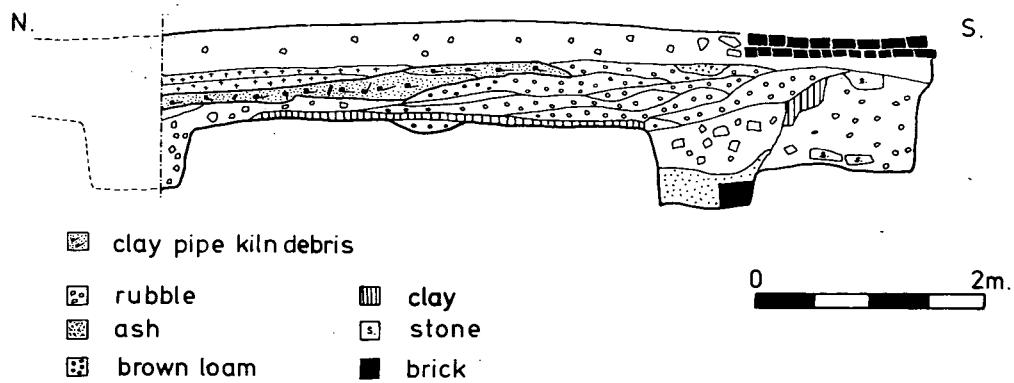


Fig. 4.



Back Silver Street, Durham: circular brick structure

VIII. Acknowledgements

Excavating a deep trench during winter time in N.E. England is a hazardous and demanding occupation. Many thanks are therefore extended to Nicky, Pete, Jim, Cecil, Eamon, John, Cathy, John and Glen who put up with these conditions. Gratitude is extended to Robin Cuming whose services we constantly used and whose buildings we undermined. I would also like to thank Eric Parsons for his reports on the finds from the site, and Yvonne Brown for drawing these finds.

APPENDIX I. CLAY PIPE REPORT

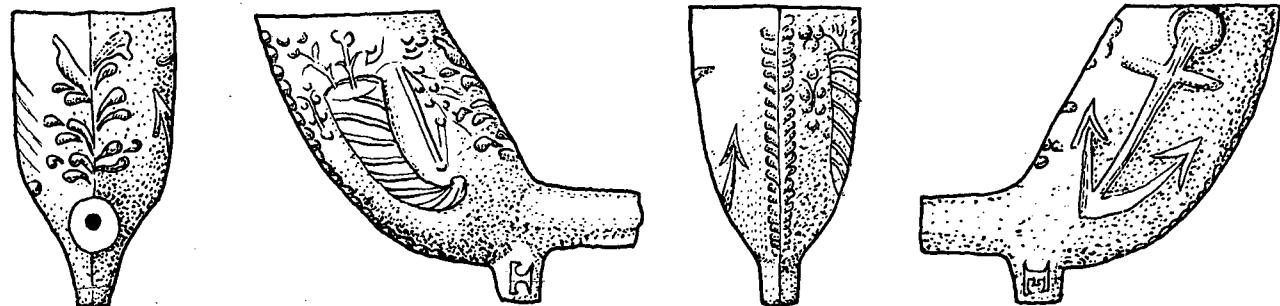
J. E. Parsons

The clay tobacco pipes from the site fall into two distinct groups (a) Material from within the first half of the nineteenth century, all except one of which represent the products of pipe manufacture on the site, (b) A group of pipes mainly of the c. 1640–70 period, but with some forms extending into the early eighteenth century.

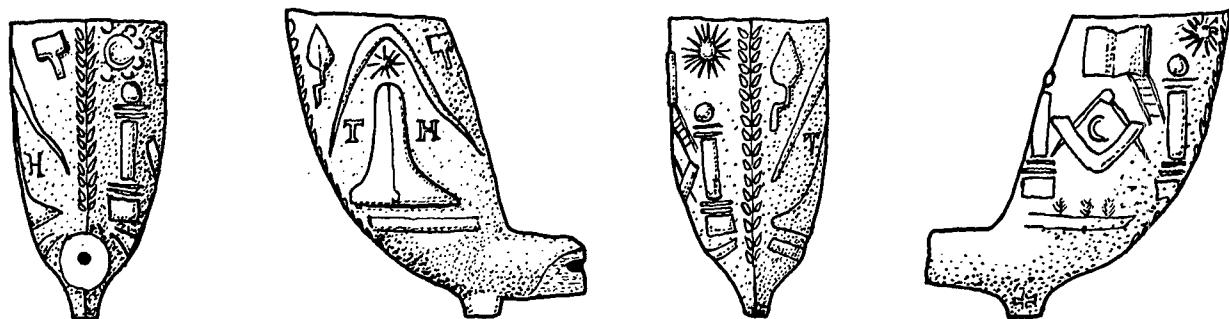
This is the first report from the North of England to include evidence of a clay pipe kiln site, as shown by the pieces of muffle, saggar fragments and distorted pipes with attached slag, all from context (10). The archaeological evidence for the pipe manufacture is also complemented to a certain extent by documentary sources. These documents record the presence of a William Dryden, pipe maker, working in Silver Street Lane (Back Silver Street) from 1827–34. However, a vast majority of the pipes recovered during the excavation bear the initials of Thomas Elsdon, pipemaker in Gateshead from 1811–51. Two possible solutions help explain this apparent dichotomy, either Dryden could have been apprenticed to Elsdon and have been supplied with one of his master's moulds to set up in business, or Elsdon may have sold-off surplus moulds within the trade.

Eighteen distinct types of decorated pipes, all from separate moulds were recovered. All are of hard, thin fabric and show the same individual mould characteristics with untrimmed spurs. Most of the bowls vary in firing colour from white through light grey to reddish brown. Some are distorted and some have adhering slag. Four types are illustrated.

Examples of kiln evidence material are shown in fig. 7.

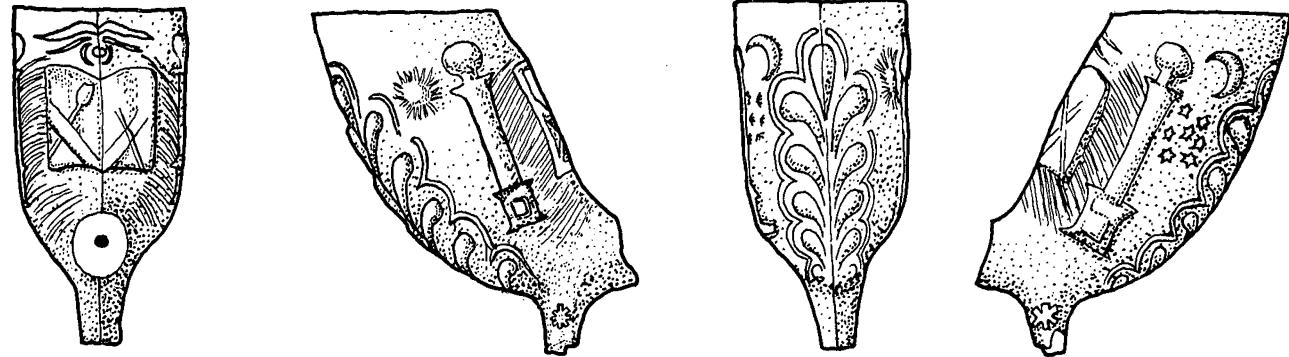


a.

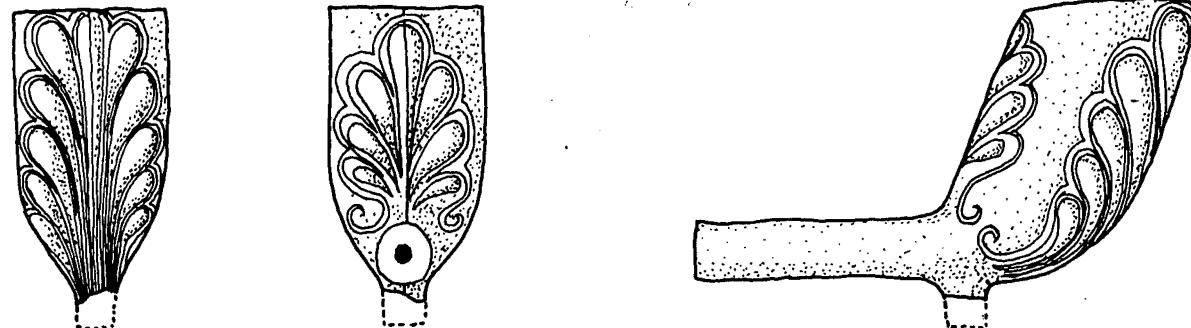


b.

Fig. 5a. Off-set overflowing cornucopia on left hand side and anchor on right hand side. Initials T E (Thomas Elsdon) appear on spur
Fig. 5b. Decorated bowls showing freemason symbols



a.



b.

Fig. 6a. Decorated bowl showing freemason symbols

Fig. 6b. Spurred pipe with large fluting decorations extending from the mould lines

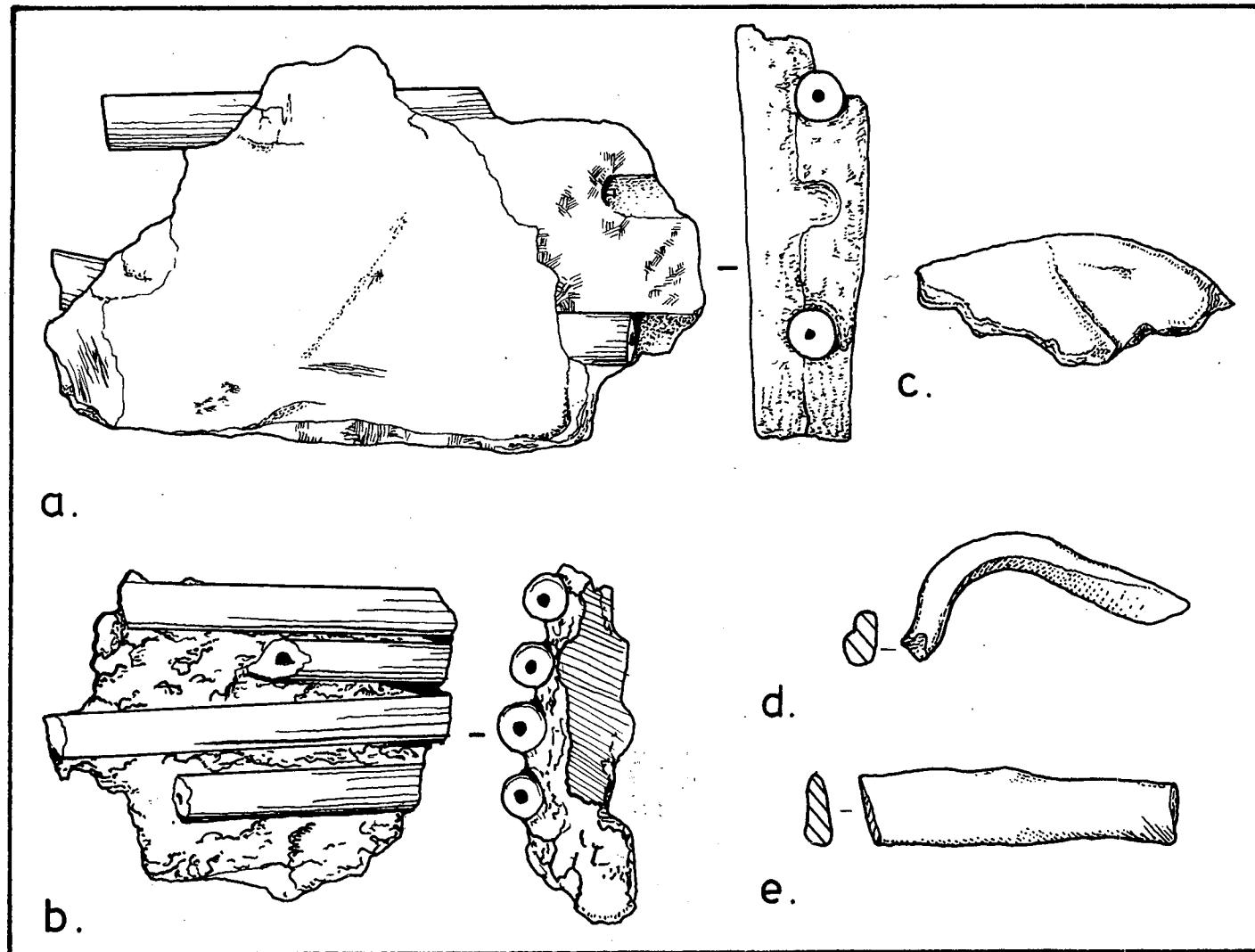


Fig. 7.

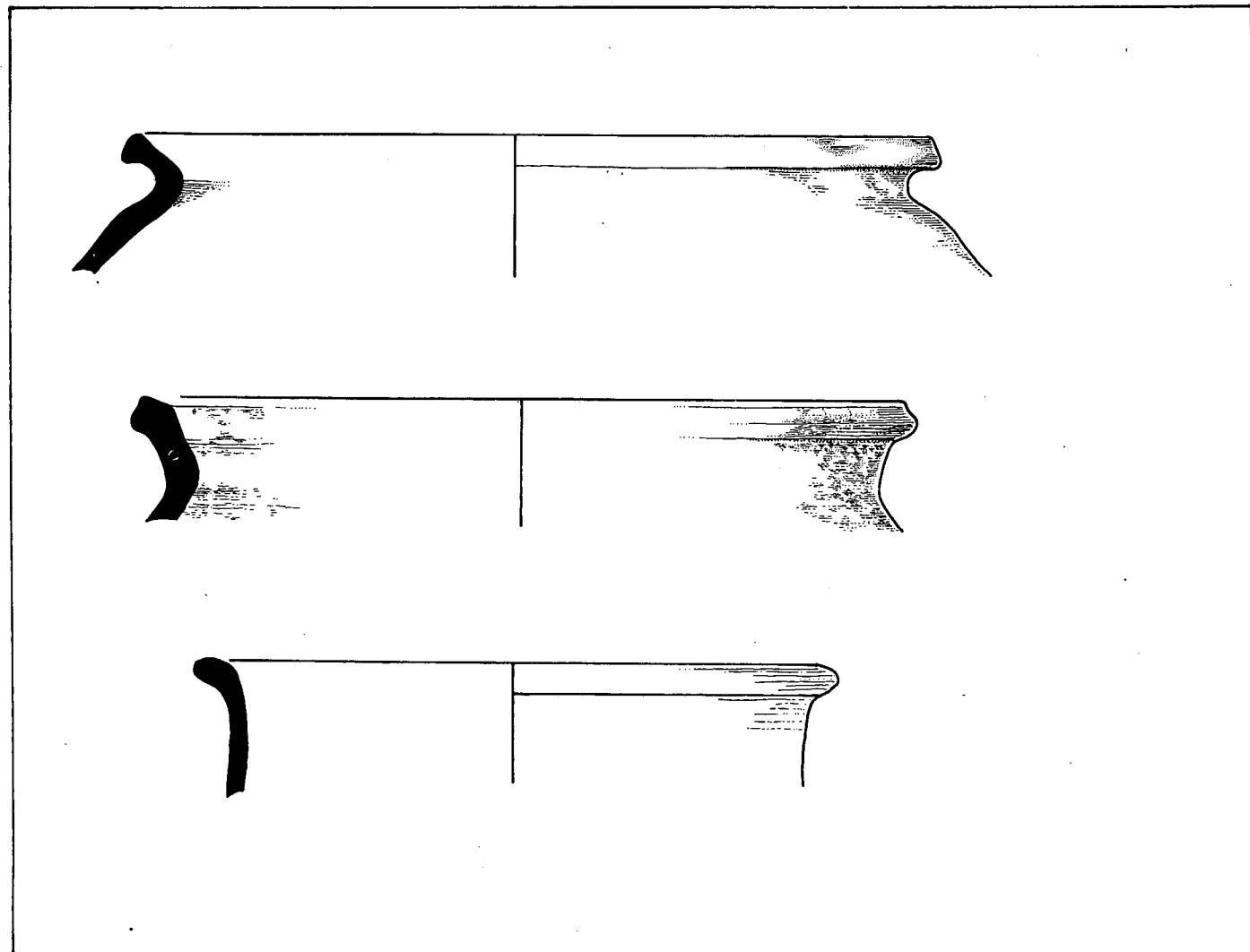


Fig. 8.

APPENDIX II. POTTERY REPORT

J. E. Parsons

Pottery from the site ranges from twelfth-century material with possibly earlier connotations, to that of the modern period. By far the largest and most diverse group of vessels are the cooking pots. Sixty-seven individual rim forms have been identified and of these a large proportion are in the twelfth-century northern style, or derivates of these forms. Of the derived types a number are in fabrics first recognised from the excavations within the city moat area during the 1960s (unpublished). Three of the rims, Fig. 8, bear comparison with cooking pots from recent excavations in Saddler Street, Durham, provisionally attributed to the early eleventh/twelfth century.

Medieval import evidence consists of a jug neck sherd from northern France, and regional imports from Scarborough and South East Durham. Certain affinities were also noted with recent finds from Carlisle and Scotland. Imported pottery of the post-medieval period is represented by Dutch tinglazes, Langewehe, Raeren, Frechen stonewares and Weser slipware.

APPENDIX III. ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

Alison M. Donaldson (Biological Laboratory, Department of Archaeology, University of Durham)

Two samples of the lower fill of the mid-thirteenth-century oven/kiln (65) were examined in the hope that they might throw light on the function of this structure.

Sample Context (70) Charcoal

This sample was almost entirely *FRAXINUS EXCELSIOR* (ash) with a few pieces of *CORYLUS AVELLANA* (hazel).

Sample Context (71) Soil

This clayey soil with small stones and fragments of carbon contained only:

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| <i>Graminae</i> (grasses) <i>Bromus T.</i> | —4 carbonized caryopses |
| <i>Carex sp</i> (sedge) | —1 carbonized nutlet |
| <i>Sambucus Nigra</i> (elder) | —1 carbonized seed |
| <i>Polygonum Lapathifolium</i> (pale persicaria) | —1 carbonized nutlet |
| <i>Hypnum Cupressiforme</i> | —uncarbonized shoot |

The charcoal probably represents the fuel used in the oven either wood or manufactured charcoal could have been used.

The seeds would seem to represent only the accidental carbonization of seeds of the types of plants likely to have been growing in this situation near the river.

The uncarbonized moss is probably a modern contaminant as soil conditions were not suitable for the preservation of uncarbonized material.

APPENDIX IV. A NOTE OF THE ANIMAL REMAINS FOUND

D. J. Rackham

All bones were catalogued to species where possible, otherwise they were listed under the non-specific headings noted in the table. Preservation of the bone on the site was good but somewhat fragmented, approximately 66% of the material was identified.

The animal bone has been studied in the archaeologically determined divisions indicated on the table. Further analysis showed that one of the most significant features observed in the material in fact overlapped some of these archaeological divisions. No well defined features or groups were noted during excavation and the majority of the bone is derived from layers spanning the fourteenth-seventeenth centuries in which no structural remains were recovered and a buildup of "garden" soil containing a rich collection of domestic debris is indicated (see above).

Although it is impossible to assess the degree of residual animal bone in accumulations of this kind the marked change in importance of sheep (or goat) as an element of the fauna in the sixteenth-century division (see table) is so dramatic as to indicate a definite economic change in this period. This may relate only to the economic use to which the site is being put rather than a gross change in husbandry practice. A more detailed analysis indicated that this phase of "importance" of sheep first occurs in the topmost layer of the deposits attributed by the archaeologist to the fifteenth century and is distinguished by the fact that over 60% of both cattle and sheep bones are non-productive elements of the skeleton (the feet, including the carpals and tarsals, and the skull and mandible). This high proportion of bones with no food value is unusual in mixed dietary rubbish and it may indicate the proximity to or part of a butcher's refuse deposit. These elements continue to be the most common bones at least into the sixteenth-century deposits. It is necessary to qualify the conclusion that "butchers refuse" has been incorporated into the deposit by pointing out that these bones are also the least likely to be fractured and made unrecognisable due to butchery and cooking and secondly they are some of the densest bones and hence survive well and are readily identified.

Analysis showed that of the sheep (or goat) metapodials from the butchers refuse, with the distal end intact, 30% were unfused indicating slaughter in their first or second year, the remaining 70% had survived at least to the end of their second year. The sheep

(or goat) vertebrae from these layers were characteristically chopped axially through the middle of the centrum indicating that the carcasses were butchered into sides.

Previous to these layers the bone numbers are dominated by cattle. Pig appears to have played a relatively unimportant part in the diet during the period represented by the deposits.

A more detailed report and the bone catalogue are filed in the biological laboratory of the Department of Archaeology, University of Durham.

TABLE 1

A table of the fragments of bone of each species in the different archaeological periods.

| | Post-Med. | 16c. | 15c. | 14c. |
|---------------------|-----------|------|------|------|
| Horse | 1 | 3 | 1 | |
| Cattle | 65 | 129 | 86 | 39 |
| Sheep or Goat | 152 | 442 | 75 | 28 |
| Sheep | 2 | 7 | 3 | 1 |
| Goat | | | | 3 |
| Pig | 10 | 33 | 19 | 8 |
| Dog/Fox | | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Cat | | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Fowl | 2 | 12 | 1 | 3 |
| Goose, cf. domestic | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Duck | | | 1 | |
| Red deer | 1 | 1 | | 2 |
| Fallow deer | | 5 | 1 | |
| Roe deer cf. | | | 1 | |
| Bird, indet. | | 6 | 2 | |
| Fish, indet. | 1 | | 1 | 3 |
| Large ungulate | 31 | 89 | 57 | 38 |
| Large animal | 29 | 60 | 37 | 19 |
| Medium animal | 19 | 45 | 24 | 10 |
| Small ungulate | 19 | 63 | 19 | 8 |
| ? | 3 | 1 | | |
| Oyster | 5 | 3 | 7 | 1 |
| Limpet | 1 | 1 | | |
| Cockle | 11 | 2 | 1 | |
| Whelk | | | 2 | |

APPENDIX V. BRICK AND TILE

J. E. Parsons

- Contexts (7), (10), (13) Several pieces of clay pantiles were discovered in these contexts, all incomplete but one having a completed length of 305 mm. All are 15 mm thick and two of the fragments have the usual projecting nib.
- Context (18) Example of a hand-pressed brick, a "nine by two": The sand-moulded overfired character of the brick with its large inclusions indicate a late seventeenth-/early eighteenth-century date.
Measurement: 223 × 111 × 50 mm

APPENDIX VI. STORAGE OF THE MATERIAL

J. Clipson

This report has been written within the guidelines of the DOE publication "Principles of Publications in Rescue Archaeology" 1975 and constitutes a level IV report. Levels II and III material constituting, the finds and more detailed reports thereon; site notes and drawings, photographs, indexes and a detailed stratigraphical report on the site are all stored and available for inspection at: University of Durham, Department of Archaeology Museum, The Old Fulling Mill, The Banks, Durham City. Any communications regarding either this report or the stored material should be sent to: Mr. J. Clipson, 48 Ladbrook Road, Solihull, West Midlands.