The Origins of Medieval Pottery in South-East Wales

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SUMMARY

This paper examines the evidence for the use and probable re-introduction of pottery in the southern Welsh borderland following the Norman conquest, based on discoveries in Monnow Street, Monmouth and material from previous excavations in the area. Burgages in Monnow Street contain a remarkably well-preserved series of medieval house floors dating from shortly after the Conquest, which have provided a 'key' to the pottery sequences in the town, especially for the period c.AD 1100 to 1400. A summary of regional assemblages containing D2 Cotswold ware is also presented.

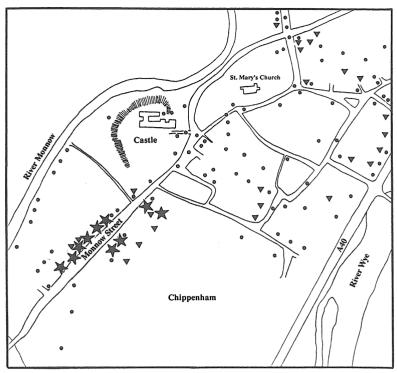
INTRODUCTION

Approaching thirty burgage plots have recently been redeveloped in Monnow Street, mainly as small-scale works. Archaeological material was recovered from most sites under salvage conditions but a number of organised excavations were also possible. Numbers 69 and 71 Monnow Street were excavated inside standing buildings over a period of twelve months; 61 and 63 Monnow Street were excavated by the Society as groundwork contractors and the latest excavation, at 22 and 24 Monnow Street, has been continuing, under standing buildings, since March 1990. These three excavations have produced the bulk of the research material but complete archaeological sequences dated c.AD 1100 - c.AD 1400 have so far been recovered from eight sites. The most important result of this work is the study of a series of well-preserved house floors. Rich in ceramics and other remains, but with very little residual material, these have provided a key to the understanding of both the medieval pottery sequence of Monmouth and the trade routes of the region. In addition, evidence of continuous Roman occupation, often associated with iron-working, has been found over much of Monmouth and in the suburb of Overmonnow, with a pre-Flavian phase recently identified at 22-24 Monnow Street and late coins and pottery from Monnow Street and elsewhere (Clarke 1990; Clarke 1991).

By contrast, the pre-Norman period is poorly represented. By the 8th century the church of St. Cadoc is believed to have been sited just off Monnow Street. This was still standing when the Normans arrived c.AD 1067 and it is described by the Breton lord Withenoc in the last quarter of the 11th century as 'on ground near my castle in my manor, where the monks were first accommodated before the church of Monmouth was finished' (Kissack 1974, 12). The evidence for Saxon occupation in Monmouth is at present negligible. The discovery of a single rim sherd of West Midlands early medieval ware in a 13th-century context at 83-85 Monnow Street has been seen as evidence for a Saxon burh at Monmouth (Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust, undated interim report). The sherd has been verified by Janet Rutter as Chester ware (for description see Rutter 1988) but there is no supporting evidence for a Saxon settlement in the town. Chester-type ware is found in Saxon contexts in Hereford and Gloucester where it is accompanied especially by D1 Cotswold ware (Vince 1985). Only D2 Cotswold ware of post-Conquest date has been recognised in Monnow Street and it seems likely that the Chester ware pot also arrived in early Norman times.

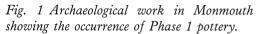
Monmouth Castle was established by AD 1067 and was quickly followed by a town settlement. Interestingly all the evidence for the earliest occupation comes from the burgages of Monnow Street, outside the castle bailey (Fig. 1). It is now clear that Monnow Street was laid out, in its present form, by around AD 1100 as part of a planned settlement. Excavation has shown that the sites were taken up at around the same time — there being no evidence of gradual colonisation or slow ribbon development. The settlers in Monnow Street brought with them various trades and were pottery users from the start - there is no aceramic phase (this last point is further discussed in the conclusions). Why Monnow Street was the site of intensive early settlement in preference to the higher ground is unclear. There is little evidence that Monnow Street was defended except by the river Monnow, which can easily be crossed for much of the year. From the 12th century the area was also subject to

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Key:

Observation of building site/roadworks (no Phase 1 pottery)
 ✓ Monmouth Archaeological Society excavation (no Phase 1 pottery)
 ✓ Phase 1 pottery from excavation/building site observation



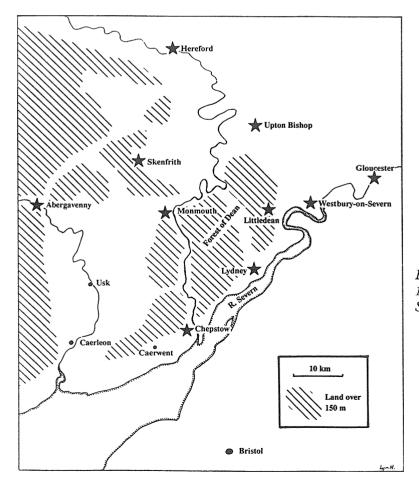


Fig. 2 The distribution of late 11th — early 12th-century D2 Cotswold ware west of the Severn.

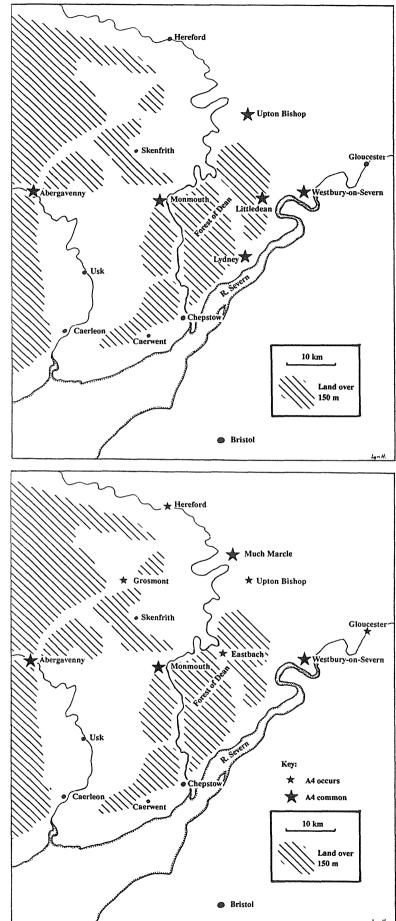
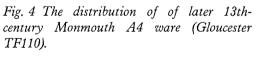


Fig. 3 The distribution of early 12th-century Monmouth A2 ware.



flooding and this seems to have been the main reason for the rising floor levels with deep stratification.

Monmouth's geographical position at the junction of Gwent (Welsh), Dean (Saxon) and Archenfield (Quisling) meant that it was an important cultural melting pot from the beginning (Kissack 1974), and when the borough was established it soon became a centre for trade. The rivers Wye and Monnow which meet at Monmouth were not only useful for carrying heavy goods but were also important as boundaries between the regions (as above) and Dioceses (Llandaff/ Hereford/Gloucester).

POTTERY AND REGIONAL TRADE

The combined evidence of the excavated sequence of house floors, the presence of stratified 11th-century coins in the earliest excavated deposits, an archaeomagnetic date of AD 1070-1130 for the last fire on a hearth at 69 Monnow Street and the known association of the town with the pottery-using centres of Hereford and Gloucester in the early Norman period suggests that the use of pottery was well established in Monnow Street by *c*.AD 1100 and that there were six ceramic phases before AD 1300. This paper is concerned with the first two ceramic phases which span the period beginning with the Norman-inspired settlement of Monnow Street and are believed to end in the third quarter of the 12th century.

Monmouth's first ceramic phase contains wares imported from Gloucester and elsewhere, together with material which is clearly of regionally local origin. These early 'local' fabrics, almost certainly dating from at least the early 12th century, do not appear to occur east of the river Severn and have not been found in northern Herefordshire or southern Gwent. It is suggested that these wares were travelling along an important overland trade and invasion route originating in the Gloucester-Worcester area – a route that was in use throughout the Middle Ages. It is interesting to note that the coastal links with Bristol and Somerset demonstrated at Chepstow, Caerwent, Llantrithyd and Penmaen are not reflected in the earliest Monmouth phase, while Bristol wares for example are only found sparsely, although diagnostically, in the second ceramic phase. As demonstrated in Appendix 1, the earliest ceramic assemblages from Monmouth are very similar to some early pottery groups from excavations on other sites in the region and it is noteworthy that, although the origins and date of this material were unknown to the excavators at the time, these may now be deduced from their published reports (Casey 1931; Scott-Garrett 1958; Radcliffe and Knight 1972-3).

The Early Medieval pottery fabrics.

The most distinctive fabric in the late 11th/early 12thcentury pottery groups from Monmouth is that of Cotswold ware, known in Monmouth and Hereford as D2 ware (Vince 1985) (Fig. 5, Nos. 3-6). These oolitic limestone-tempered cooking pots, produced in the Vale of Gloucester, are recognisable in assemblages from nine settlements west of the Severn (Fig. 2), which all seem to date from the first half of the 12th century or earlier. These are Abergavenny, Chepstow, Monmouth and Skenfrith in Gwent; Hereford and Upton Bishop in Hereford & Worcester; Chax Hill (Westbury-on-Severn), Littledean Camp and Lydney Castle in Gloucestershire.¹

In Monmouth's first ceramic phase D2 Cotswold ware is accompanied by two sand-tempered wares (Monmouth A1 & A2 — see Appendix 2). There is also a very rare, petrologically and typologically distinct sandstone-tempered ware of unknown (but probably local) origin (Monmouth A12) and equally rare early Malvernian cooking pots (Monmouth and Hereford B1).

The cooking pot fabrics A2 (Fig. 5, Nos. 1 and 2) and A1 (Fig. 5, Nos. 7-12 and 14) are very similar to one another and to some of the later A3 cooking pots (Hereford A8), which Vince (1991) has demonstrated at Chepstow come from a variety of sources. When dealing with small sherds it may be difficult to distinguish between these wares, but Fabrics A1 and A2 are usually typologically distinct (see Appendix 2), with A2 forms recognisable in groups already noted as containing D2 fabrics, such as Chax Hill (Westburyon-Severn), Littledean Camp, Lydney Castle and Upton Bishop.² Although the Lydney Castle group does contain what appears to be Ham Green ware (Barton 1963), it probably dates from before the middle of the 12th century. This assemblage, together with the Littledean pottery, particularly echoes Monmouth's first and second ceramic phases and is not confused by later material.

The distribution of Monmouth A2 cooking pots (Fig. 3) might suggest an origin near Monmouth; the distribution of Monmouth A1 is unclear, but these cooking pots have a typological link with early Malvernian products (Hereford and Monmouth B1) which are also occasionally found in Monmouth's ceramic phase 1. The A1 fabric does not appear to occur in Hereford and it does not contain the igneous rock that distinguishes the B1's.

Overland trade routes.

The distribution of non-local wares in the region reflects different trading patterns in different parts of the county. In the south there were strong coastal links between the Chepstow/Caerwent area and Bristol/ Somerset. In the north the original links were with Gloucester and the Forest of Dean/south Herefordshire, and later increasingly with the Malverns, although regionally local industries soon dominated the market. There was clearly an important

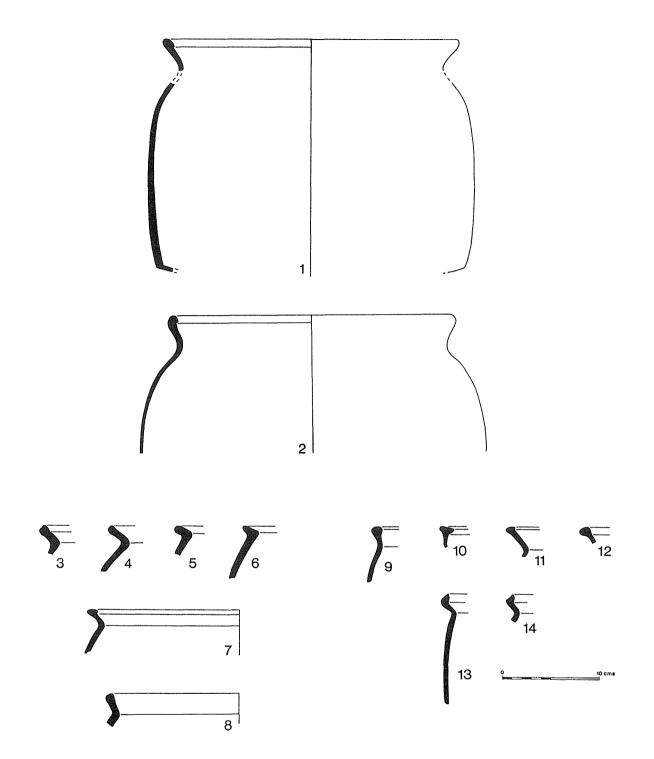


Fig. 5 Monmouth A2 (Nos. 1 and 2), D2 Cotswold ware (Nos. 3-6), A1 (Nos. 7-12 and 14) and B1 Malvern (No. 13). The pottery comes from the following contexts:

1. 69 Monnow Stree	rt, Context 298
2. 69 Monnow Stree	t, Context 298
3. 71 Monnow Stree	et, Context 179
4. 75 Monnow Stree	rt, Context A12
5. 71 Monnow Stree	rt, Context 184
6. 71 Monnow Stree	et, Context 194A
7. 71 Monnow Stree	et, Context 181

8. 48 Monnow Street, Context A8
9. 71 Monnow Street, Context 151B
10. 71 Monnow Street, Context 193
11. 71 Monnow Street, Context 179
12. 71 Monnow Street, Context 151B
13. 69 Monnow Street, Context 295A
14. 69 Monnow Street, Context 295A

east-west trade route which connected the Gloucestershire/Worcestershire area with Wales; this runs through Monmouth (Vince 1987) at least as far west as Abergavenny, a distance of 75 km. The identification of a 13th-century Malvernian cooking pot at Brecon, Powys (Vince 1977) suggests that this route may have extended even further to the west. These overland trade routes are first demonstrated during the earliest Norman period, when the presence of D2 Cotswold ware is indicative of very early town settlements or defended sites west of the Severn.

The Monmouth sequences seem to suggest that the earlier the context, the higher the percentage of D2 ware. By the middle of the 12th century Cotswold ware rapidly decreases as regionally local wares begin to dominate. It is in this second ceramic phase (beginning c.AD 1140?) that Malvernian tripod pitchers appear and are joined by occasional Ham Green cooking pots and then by Ham Green-style glazed wares. The continuing use of the Gloucester - Abergavenny route throughout the Middle Ages is demonstrated by the distribution of Monmouth fabric A4 (Gloucester TF110) in Monmouth's sixth ceramic phase. This sand-and-limestone-tempered ware, which has not been found in Chepstow, is rare in Hereford, but totally dominates some late 13th-century contexts in Westbury-on-Severn, Monmouth and Abergavenny (Fig. 4).

There is now evidence for several routes leading into the borderland (A. Vince pers. comm.). One of these passes through Gloucester, and from there branches in directions: down the Severn (supplying three Chepstow, Lydney, Littledean, Westbury, etc.); overland to Ross-on-Wye (presumably), after which one route goes down the Wye, and the other up to Hereford. The various finds of Worcester jugs and Malvern Chase wares in the middle Wye Valley may have come directly over or round the Malverns or may have arrived via Gloucester. Some of these routes probably follow Roman roads and it has been suggested that the east-west Roman roads continued as trade routes after the mainly military north-south routes had gone out of use (R. Shoesmith pers. comm.).

A pre-Conquest market for pottery in the Forest of Dean (as yet unproven) together with the new demand from Norman-inspired settlements at Monmouth and in the Welsh borderland may have been the catalyst that brought about the establishment of the regionally local A1 and A2 pottery industry by the early 12th century.

CONCLUSIONS

Pottery from Monmouth's first ceramic phase is among the earliest excavated post-Conquest material in Wales. Some of the fabrics can be used as indicators of very early contexts elsewhere and have now been recognised on eight other sites west of the Severn. All these sites are either early Norman town settlements, castles or other defensive or probably defensive sites. Cotswold wares are very distinctive and should be easily detected in assemblages in the future. Monmouth A1 and A2 wares however will need further study before they can be used as a reliable indicator of Norman or Norman-inspired occupation.

It seems probable that the native Welsh did not take up pottery usage with any enthusiasm for some two centuries after the Conquest. The work of the Monmouth Archaeological Society over nearly forty years has produced no evidence of pottery usage from sites in the countryside around Monmouth until some decades into the 13th century. The evidence suggests that the indigenous peoples outside the towns continued their aceramic traditions long after the Norman invasion. Dr. Paul Courtney has suggested that in upland areas of Wales pottery may have been absent even into post-medieval times (Welsh Medieval Pottery Research Group meeting, Cardiff, Dec. 1990). The native peoples of southern Herefordshire (Archenfield) may also have been aceramic; they certainly retained many Welsh laws and customs after the Conquest. The situation could have been different in the Forest of Dean where a Saxon presence was well established.

The continuing research in Monmouth can be expected to increase our knowledge of the origins and development of pottery usage in south-east Wales. It is hoped that comparative studies of neighbouring towns will eventually bring a closer dating of ceramics, a greater understanding of medieval trade and the pattern of pottery usage over a large area of southern Wales and its English borderlands.

APPENDIX 1.

OTHER POTTERY ASSEMBLAGES CONTAINING D2 COTSWOLD WARE

Abergavenny, Gwent³.

A reassessment by the author of ceramics from excavations in Abergavenny (Radcliffe and Knight 1972-3) has revealed previously unrecognised 12th-century material. When compared with the Monmouth sequences it is now clear that pottery was being used in Abergavenny early in the 12th century if not before. It should be mentioned that this conclusion is at variance with the results of other recent work (Papazian 1990).

D2 Cotswold ware is surprisingly widespread, being found in single contexts at Castle Street and Flannel Street, in three contexts at Ewers Garden and in eight contexts at the Orchard site. Early and later Malvernian cooking pots (B1) were also noted, as well as mid 12th-century (B2) and late 12th/early 13thcentury (B3) Malvernian tripod pitchers. Cooking pots of similar fabric and form to Monmouth A2 wares have yet to be studied in thin section but the relationship between the ceramics of the two towns over two centuries is indisputable and is explained by an east-west overland trade route.

Chepstow, Gwent.

D2 Cotswold ware (rare) and early Bristol forms (Vince 1991).

Skenfrith, Gwent.

Jeremy Knight has allowed the examination of a rim sherd of D2 Cotswold ware from Skenfrith Castle (Craster 1967; Knight 1987). 'The sherd came from the primary silting of a ditch under the castle which was entirely silted up before a wall, possibly of a hall which may be associated with documented work of the AD 1180s, was cut through it. Ditch and wall underlie the castle of Hubert de Burgh built in AD 1219-1232' (J. Knight pers. comm.)

Upton Bishop, Hereford & Worcester.

Field walking following the ploughing of low earthworks recently discovered at Upton Bishop (NGR SO 652281) by Mrs. Elizabeth Taylor of the Woolhope Club Archaeological Research Section produced pottery matching that from Monmouth's early ceramic phases (Taylor forthcoming). The pottery assemblage recovered comprises cooking pottery typologically and visually the same as Monmouth A2, D2 Cotswold ware cooking pottery and later medieval pottery including Malvern wares. The nature of the earthworks and their location would indicate that the site was defensive.

Chax Hill, Westbury-on-Severn, Gloucestershire.

Chax Hill (NGR SO 737144) is probably a defensive — certainly a defendable — site in a commanding position in a loop of the river Severn, 100 feet (30 metres) above sea level. It has wide views to Gloucester and down the Severn. Gordon MacDonald (pers. comm.) believes that an inlet below Chax Hill was anciently navigable (it has flooded in recent years) and that the hill was probably the site of a Roman fort. He has traced certain low earthworks overlooking the Severn and unearthed a well and Roman and native-style pottery during an excavation in his garden. This same excavation has also produced medieval and later pottery.

The medieval pottery includes cooking pots of Monmouth A2 type and D2 Cotswold ware. The A2 pottery has yet to be studied in thin section but typologically and visually under the binocular microscope it seems identical to the Monmouth material. The D2 pottery is clearly oolitic limestone-tempered ware from the Vale of Gloucester with the same forms as those from the early Monmouth contexts.

Littledean Camp, Gloucestershire.

Littledean Camp is a ringwork set about 600 feet (185 metres) above sea level on the eastern side of the Forest of Dean (NGR SO 676135). It has views across the river Severn from Gloucester to the Bristol Channel. The site was excavated in the 1950's by the Forest of Dean Local History Group (Scott-Garrett 1958).

The site seems to be the one referred to as the 'Old Castle of Dene' in charters dealing with the institution of Flaxley Abbey sometime between AD 1148 and AD 1154. Scott-Garrett read the word 'old' of the charters as meaning 'disused' rather than 'ancient' and arrived at the conclusion that the camp is a Norman one which in the middle of the 12th century had been abandoned long enough to merit the adjective 'old'. He wrote: 'We think, therefore, that Littledean Camp belongs much more likely to the early part of the 12th century or the end of the 11th century rather than to the Anarchial period (AD 1139-1151) in the reign of Stephen when the Empress Matilda was contesting the throne, and to which Mr. Casey has dated the erection of the stone built Norman Castle in Lydney Park, and consequently that the local infolded rim pottery existed throughout the whole first half of the 12th century' (Scott-Garrett 1958, 58). The Monmouth pottery sequences support Dr. Scott-Garrett's conclusions and dating.

The excavation consisted mainly of sections in the central floor area of the earthwork and was restricted by the presence of standing timber. Even so the site appears to have been fairly well covered and the pottery is probably representative of the occupation. There is no evidence of anything later than Monmouth's first ceramic phase. No glazed wares are recorded. The dominant cooking pottery seems identical to Monmouth's A2 ware and as at Monmouth it is accompanied by D2 Cotswold ware. The percentage of Cotswold ware seems to be lower than in the earliest Monmouth contexts (six A2 type rims to two D2) — this may be fortuitous or may be an indication that it fits the later part of the phase. It has not been possible to trace the pottery from Littledean Camp although Alan Vince confirmed the presence of two rims of D2 Cotswold ware during research for his PhD thesis.

Lydney, Gloucestershire.

Lydney Castle on the borders of the Forest of Dean (NGR SO 617025) was excavated in 1930 by D.A. Casey. He fully excavated the stone structures which proved to be of the 'Norman keep and bailey type which persisted down to the close of the 12th century' (Casey 1931, 246). The site seems to have been occupied for only a short period. Casey argued convincingly that Lydney might have been built at any time from the beginning of the reign of Henry I (AD 1100) to the close of the reign of Henry II (AD 1189) but that the most likely period was during the Anarchy in the reign of Stephen (AD 1139–51). When compared with the Monmouth sequences the published pottery would support this dating.

Although it has not been possible to trace the pottery from the excavation (a search having been made in the collections of the Gloucester, Newport and British Museums and the National Museum of Wales), the descriptions, drawings and photographs in the report provide a very complete idea of the assemblage and allows identification with a fair degree of certainty. The material is dominated by unglazed cooking pots with the same typology as Monmouth A2. There are glazed sherds of what are almost certainly early Bristol, Ham Green-type pitchers and a rim of D2 Cotswold ware. Although no quantitative assessment is possible, this pottery group reflects the early part of Monmouth's second ceramic phase, probably commencing before the middle of the 12th century. Casey noted that 'The area of the castle was thoroughly covered by the excavations, so that the pottery found must be fairly representative of the full range of types in use and is perhaps not the least important of the results of the excavations' (ibid, 261).

APPENDIX 2.

THE A1 AND A2 WARES

A1 and A2 cooking pots were made from similar clays with inclusions derived from the Old Red Sandstone which extends west of the river Severn in the Forest of Dean, southern Herefordshire and Gwent. The continuing study of the petrology and typology of these two forms should lead to a more useful definition, but the following comparative notes may be helpful:

Fabric types and firing.

1. A1 — The inclusions are mostly angular and sub-angular quartz (some metamorphosed) generally below 0.6 mm but grains up to 2 mm occur; there is some red staining and veins with haematite, some iron ore; feldspar fragment in one thin section.

2. A2 — The inclusions comprise poorly sorted, mainly milky with some red stained quartz, generally sub-angular below 1 mm but more larger grains than A1 (up to 4 mm). Some large lumps of micaceous sandstone cemented by an iron-rich cement; haematite stained greywacks, red siltstone and iron ore are present in a fine matrix.

3. A very fine mica is common on the surfaces of the A2 fabric but is much rarer on the A1. Calcareous inclusions are very rare in A1 (to 1 mm) while A2 has rare limestone grains (up to 4 mm) and occasional distinctive fragments of shell (up to 6 mm).

4. The A1 fabric has laminations which show best in edge sections polished with carborundum powder; this is less pronounced in the A2 fabric.

5. Al surfaces are generally finely pimpled, while A2 surfaces can be smoother (wiped?).

6. Al pots are reduced with black surfaces, while A2 pots usually have oxidised surfaces (dark to red-brown) with a grey core, although some are totally oxidised.

Form types.

A1 rims are often everted, usually finer than A2 but variable. One form bears a striking resemblance to some early Malvernian (B1) cooking pots which have been found in the same contexts (Fig. 5, No. 13). The style and firing of this form of A1 may be a clue to the origins of this particular potter.

The early A2 rims are always everted, usually with a distinctive rounded outer edge and with the inturn often tending towards or actually folded over. Bases are usually thickened at the edges with a trimmed appearance.

Footnotes

1. William FitzOsbern, earl of Hereford, founded Monmouth and Chepstow castles before his death in AD 1071.

Hamelin de Ballon built the first motte and bailey at Abergavenny c.AD 1090.

- Skenfrith probably dates from the original establishment of the defensive river line by FitzOsbern before AD 1071.
- Upton Bishop is mentioned in Domesday. Monmouth Priory owned the tithe of Linton which is adjoining.

Lydney belonged in AD 1146 to the abbey of St. Florent at Saumur which also owned Monmouth.

- 2. The distribution map of Monmouth A2 cooking pots compiled for this paper (Fig. 3) suggests to Dr. Vince (pers. comm.) that the Forest of Dean (or at least the Anglo-Normans living there) looked to the middle Wye Valley (probably Monmouth itself) for its pottery. He feels that the immediate source for the D2 cooking pots at Skenfrith and Abergavenny was also Monmouth and this would imply that Monmouth was a regional centre which had other towns, such as Abergavenny, within its sphere of influence.
- 3. The pottery from excavations in Abergavenny and Chepstow is held by the Monmouth Museums. The pottery from Skenfrith Castle is mainly stored in Newport Museum; one Monnow Valley ware jug is on display in the National Museum of Wales. The finds from Upton Bishop are in the possession of Mrs Taylor and will ultimately be deposited in Hereford Museum, while the material from Chax Hill is in the private museum of Mr MacDonald. The pottery from Littledean and Lydney has not been traced.

Acknowledgements

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Résumé

Cette étude examine la preuve d'utilisation et probablement aussi de la reintroduction de poterie dans les territoires frontaliers du sud du Pays de Galles suivant la conquête normande. Ces preuves sont basées sur les découvertes faitent à Monmouth et sur les matériaux provenant de fouilles archéologiques faitent précédement dans la région. L'archéologie a montré que les anciennes propriétés de Monnow Street, Monmouth, présentent une serie de planchers de maisons médiévales remarquablement bien préservés, datant de juste après la conquête normande. La poterie provenant de ces planchers, qui contient peu de matériaux résiduels, permis d'élucider la séquence céramique de la ville surtout pour la période d'environs 1100 à 1400 après JC. Un résumé des collections régionales des céramiques de type 'D2 Cotswold' est aussi présenté.

Bob Trett (Newport Museum); Elizabeth Taylor; Malcolm Watkin (Gloucester Museum); and finally the members of the Monmouth Archaeological Society who have carried out the excavation and recording work.

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Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel werden auf Grund der Funde in Monmouth und des Materials aus früheren Ausgrabungen in diesem Gebiet die Hinweise untersucht für die Verwendung und vermutliche Wiedereinführung von Keramik im südlichen walisischen Grenzland nach der normannischen Eroberung. Archäologische Untersuchungen haben gezeigt, daß Bürgerhäuser in Monnow Street, Monmouth, eine Reihe bemerkenswert gut erhaltener mittelalterlicher Fußböden aus der Zeit kurz nach der normannischen Eroberung enthalten. Die wenigen Keramikfunde von diesen Böden haben dennoch den 'Schlüssel' für die Keramikabfolge in der Stadt geliefert, insbesondere für den Zeitraum circa 1100 bis 1400. Eine Zusammenfassung der regionalen Fundverbände mit D2 Cotswold-Ware wird auch vorgelegt.