

A RECENTLY EXCAVATED POTTERY ASSEMBLAGE FROM MERE, WILTSHIRE

Introduction.

The following comprises an interim statement on a group of 13th- to 16th-century pottery excavated at White Hill House, Mere (ST 81873075). Until 1980 the house and outbuildings were part of the adjacent White Hill Farm, which in the Norman period was known as La Leigh. The site lies on a plateau of Kimmeridge clay 1.75 km south-east of Mere, and 2 km from the castle situated to the west of Mere, which has been dated to AD 1253. The growing importance of Mere during the early 14th century is reflected in the fact that it returned two members of Parliament, one of whom was Henricus de Horsington, who owned land between White Hill and the borders of Gillingham Forest to the south-west. A Horsington Lane still exists in the parish today. A short distance to the north-west of White Hill House is Woodland Manor, which dates from c.AD 1375, while a disused mill lies nearby to the west.

The pottery discussed below was found during restoration work on White Hill House, when the owner removed the soil below the flagstone floor in a room at the west end of the house to a depth of approximately 0.90 m. The pottery was distributed throughout this soil, with no apparent stratification. More pottery was found outside the west wall of the house when a small excavation (depth 0.30 m), led by the writer, was carried out by members of the Shaftesbury branch of the Young Archaeologists Club. Further sherds were recovered from the ground surface in the garden some 50 m to the west.

The pottery.

A total of 11.730 kg of pottery was recovered from the site. The fabrics appear to fall into three main groups: Laverstock, Bath area, and 'local' (at present called West Wiltshire ware).

Laverstock-type ware. This includes both fine and coarse wares, all in a hard fabric. The abundant quartz temper accounts for up to 30% of the fabric (for further details see Spoerry 1990). Most sherds have unoxidised cores and are light grey or pinkish in colour, but some are dark grey. Some base sherds have an oxidised outer surface, grey core and black inner surface. The vessels appear to be made by hand and/or on a turntable; all the rims seem to be 'wheel'-finished.

A minimum of eleven rim forms has been identified. These range from upright with a flattened upper surface to everted with either a rounded or angular outer edge. The coarsewares mainly comprise cooking pots/storage vessels, but jugs (both plain and glazed) and a flat-bottomed 'dish' (see Jope 1952; Musty 1969, 107) were also found. Sagging bases and scratch-marked pottery are both present. The glazed jugs, which range from yellow, orange or brown to pale green, are also decorated, one having an anthropomorphic face.

Bath area. This small group may include some Minety ware (see Dunning 1949; Watts and Rahtz 1985; Vince 1991). The fabric is coarse, with occasional limestone and black inclusions. It is hard and mainly evenly fired throughout; the surface colour varies from buff to light brown to light grey.

A minimum of six rim forms have been identified, including both upright and everted; the bases are sagging. Only jugs and cooking pots are represented.

West Wiltshire ware. This 'local' ware probably includes material from both Mere and Crockerton (Le Patourel 1968), but some may be from Dorset (see Spoerry 1990). Most of the pottery is coarse, but some fine wares are present; all are hard. The fabric is micaceous with moderate fine (<1 mm) quartz inclusions (up to 15% of the fabric). Most sherds are buff-coloured throughout, but some have a buff core with oxidised surfaces. The surfaces generally have a smoother feel than the Laverstock wares.

A minimum of fifteen rim forms has been identified, some upright and flat-topped, but mostly everted with either a rounded or angular outer edge. The coarseware forms mainly comprise cooking pots/storage jars with flat or sagging bases; a few jug sherds, two 'plates' and three flat-bottomed 'dishes' are also present. The latter have convex sides and a base diameter of 280–320 mm; none are scratch-marked. The jug sherds include one rod handle (unglazed), and one strap handle with an olive green glaze. One of the 'plates' is unglazed, with a thumbled rim; the other, which has an olive green glaze, has a flanged rim decorated with an incised wavy line around the flat-topped rim edge (9 mm wide); another wavy line is present on the unglazed underside of the flange, 30 mm below the rim.

Other finds. Also present are fragments of Tudor Green (2lobed) cup. No imported wares have so far been identified. Other finds from the site include a silver coin of Edward I, dated AD 1302 (Canterbury mint) and objects of copper alloy, notably a seal matrix showing Saints Peter and Paul; a thumb ring with a cruciform impression on either side of the bezel and part of a damascened spur.

Discussion.

Most of the pottery described above is of relatively local origin, but all the wares found probably reached the site via markets and fairs which in the past were held regularly in Mere, where pottery made both locally and further afield could be purchased. Nash Hill, Lacock should, however, also be considered a possible distribution centre. Further work on the site, and research into the pottery from this area of Wiltshire is required before any real conclusions may be drawn.

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AN UNIDENTIFIED CERAMIC OBJECT FROM POOLE, DORSET

The ceramic find which forms the subject of this note (Fig. 1) is from one of a succession of upper beach deposits investigated at the Foundry site, Poole Harbour (Watkins forthcoming, context 353, Phase C). The ceramics from these beach deposits show little evidence of wear through water action, suggesting that the 'beach' was only occasionally submerged. The dating of these