

Fig. 1. A sherd from an unusual green-glazed ceramic object with fleur-de-lis decoration in white slip, found in Poole, Dorset.

layers is, however, not very tight, the phase assemblages suggesting quite lengthy periods of exposure/accumulation. This particular phase can be approximately dated to the period AD 1350–1550, but this context is more likely to be from the first fifty years of this range.

The provenance of the sherd is problematical; it is probably English, but could be French. The off-white fabric is sandy (the majority of the quartz grains are under 2 mm), with occasional larger grog. It is reduced to a light grey with an oxidised orange-brown layer under the glaze, which is thick, olive green, and present on both surfaces. The sherd is very flat; it does not appear to have been thrown on a wheel (there are no stress lines), but neither is there any direct evidence (such as a sanded underside) for mould manufacture.

The decoration comprises a neatly applied fleur-de-lis design in a fine off-white slip on the upper, or outer surface, which stands 1 mm proud at the centre. Adjacent to this is a separate body of off-white slip which is surrounded by a depression c.0.5 mm deep and about 2 mm across. The rounded surfaces of the white slip suggest that it was applied in a semi-liquid state. It is likely that a stencil was used to make the design, and that the depression was formed by the manufacturer pressing onto a stencil while applying the white clay.

The edges of the sherd appear to have been deliberately shaped by smoothing the breaks along the two straight edges and clipping and rubbing the rounded edge. This suggests a secondary use, perhaps as a gaming piece, but provides no clue to the original function of the piece. Suggestions have included a decorative lid, part of an ornamental salt or table decoration, or a local attempt at stove-tile manufacture. None of these, however, are very satisfactory, and any other suggestions are welcomed; slides can be provided for further consideration, if necessary.

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LATE MEDIEVAL POTSHERD HEARTHES

Recent excavations by the Milton Keynes Archaeology Unit at the deserted medieval village at Westbury, Shenley Brook End,

Buckinghamshire and by the Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit at West Cotton, Raunds, Northamptonshire revealed several unusual hearths constructed of potsherds for which a literature search and discussion with colleagues and members of the MPRG has produced no parallels. It is with this in mind that the following note is presented. The authors would be grateful for ideas on the nature and function of this practice.

Potsherds have been analysed from two of the better preserved and most easily recognisable hearths at Westbury; four hearths are known altogether from this site. The four hearths from West Cotton were of composite construction, using pitched limestone fragments and some pitched pottery which has not yet been analysed in detail.

Westbury, hearth 1.

The remains of this hearth (Fig. 1) appear to be positioned adjacent to a wall within a medieval building. The full extent of the hearth is not clear but enough survived to show that at least a part of it was circular. The bulk of this hearth was made up from half a vessel of uncertain form, partially glazed on the exterior. The fabric is a late medieval type from the Potterspurty area, Northants (Mynard 1970). This vessel when reconstructed reached from the shoulder to the base angle, of which only the smallest edge remained. Bowl sherds, a jug sherd and several sherds of unknown form were also used to construct part of the hearth. There was very little evidence of burning or sooting on the hearth sherds. The reconstructed pot showed a slight sooting on one edge, and a little pale smudging of soot on the inner surface of a few other sherds from it.

Westbury, hearth 2.

This example (Fig. 2) was much more complete, forming an approximate circle with smaller sherds concentrated towards the centre. It was made up from at least three reconstructable pots and other sherds of uncertain form. The material was again mainly Potterspurty ware of late medieval date. Not all sherds showed signs of burning or sooting and those on the northern edge were surprisingly clean. The position of this hearth within a building is not clear. Was this area used as hard standing?

West Cotton, hearths 1–4.

At West Cotton, hearths made of pitched stone and pot sherds were investigated in each of the four excavated tenements. They were all situated at, or near the centre of rooms containing a diversity of internal features indicating that they were kitchens, although in two instances it is also likely that a non-domestic activity, possibly dyeing or fulling, was also being carried out within the same or the adjacent room.

The hearths were between 0.8 m and 1.2 m in diameter and were sub-circular or oval in plan. Only a single example, Hearth F6182 (Fig. 3), was completely undisturbed, but all exhibit consistent characteristics from which a general description of their form and functioning may be provided. Each hearth consists of two elements:

1) A large horizontal limestone slab of square or rectangular plan, measuring 0.5 m to 0.6 m long, with a blackened, flaking and friable surface. In only one example (Fig. 1c), was the whole hearth-stone present; generally they had become cracked and fragmented with many of the fragments having been lost. There is no doubt that the horizontal slab formed the actual hearth-stone upon which the fire was set.

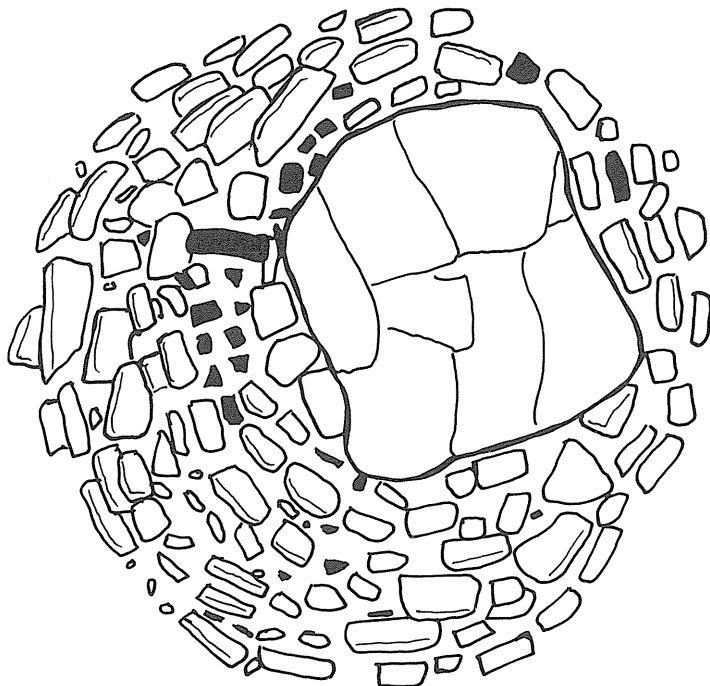
2) An oval or crescentic area of pitched limestone fragments set in concentric rings and incorporating pottery sherds deliberately set between the pitched limestone. These settings flanked and partially surrounded the hearth-stones. The projecting edges of the pitched stones were usually only reddened with minimal blackening, indicating that they had been subjected to less intense heating than the horizontal hearth-stones.

Fig. 1. Westbury, Bucks. Hearth 1, made of pitched potsherds.



Fig. 2. Westbury, Bucks. Hearth 2, made of pitched potsherds.

Fig. 3. West Cotton, Northants. Hearth F6182, made of pitched limestone and potsherds.



Pot sherds
Limestone
Stone
Burnt Soil



Discussion.

The hearths were built of pitched potsherds at Westbury, and of pitched limestone and potsherds at West Cotton; they were well set into the earth floors to form a concentric pattern and uniform surface. Full use was made of the obvious point of the sherd for insertion, and this dictated the pitch of a sherd in relation to the ground. Perhaps the soil needed puddling prior to the construction of a hearth? The hearths at Westbury had been considerably disturbed; comparison with those examples at West Cotton would suggest that at Westbury only the ancillary settings have been recovered, and that the hearth-stones had

been totally lost, although their location may be represented by an adjacent area of burning as was seen with hearth 2 (Fig. 1b).

Pale sooting, smudging and abrasion on pottery sherds, with associated burning, are often the only diagnostic features evident to show that they have been used as make up for a hearth. This theory has been confirmed by an example at Westbury (not illustrated here), where close examination of scattered sherds associated with burnt soil proved to be a pot hearth.

It is not always possible to tell whether sherds have been sooted externally before breakage, *i.e.* during primary use. One

sherd from Westbury, hearth 2 certainly showed heavy sooting internally and was abraded. At Westbury a few buckled sherds were also present, but these are thought to have been distorted during manufacture. It is clear that in all the hearths studied, the sherds came from only a limited number of vessels, perhaps one to four per hearth, and it would seem that the pots had been deliberately broken rather than sherds gathered at random. This practice seems particularly curious at West Cotton, where there was no shortage of small fragments of limestone. While the sherds form only a part of these pitched surfaces, it would appear that for some reason their use was considered necessary or at least desirable.

Further questions regarding the use of the hearths are raised by the fact that at Westbury a considerable amount of fired clay was found on site. Did these structures have covers? However, at West Cotton it would appear that they were all central, open-hearths.

These structures illustrate yet another previously unknown use for broken pottery (Jennings 1990; Moorhouse 1978).

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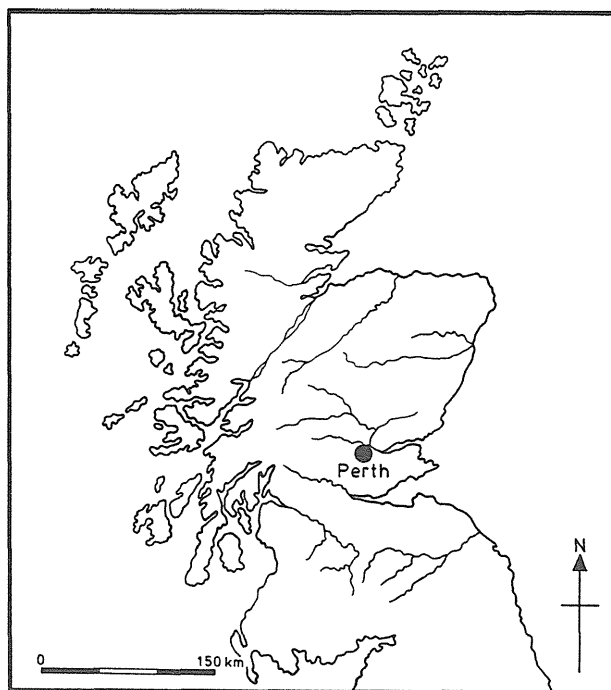
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POTTERY IMPORTED INTO MEDIEVAL PERTH

Over a decade of excavations by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust Ltd in the medieval burgh of Perth have produced a large quantity of medieval pottery. Despite the fact that only a small percentage of this pottery is from the earliest deposits, it provides a body of data unrivalled by any other Scottish burgh.

The purpose of this report is to present in a summary form a preliminary statement of the quantity of non-local fabric types found in ten excavations carried out between 1979 and 1989 (3601 sherds). This broad approach unavoidably causes some loss of detail but provides a much needed overview of general trends. The pottery fabrics have been divided into those of the earlier and middle to later medieval periods (defined here as pre- and post-AD 1250).

The dates of production of Scarborough ware, and the possibility of recognising a change in this fabric over time, are unresolved issues. In 1982 the Farmers proposed that there were two chronologically distinct wares, Fabric 1, dated to c.AD 1135-1198/1225 and Fabric 2, dated to c.AD 1215/1225-1350 (Farmer and Farmer 1982, 83-4). In Perth, however, both Fabrics 1 and 2 are frequently found together in circumstances which throw doubt on this framework (MacAskill *et al.* 1987, 101; Cheer forthcoming); similar doubts have been raised as a result of work in Hull, Aberdeen and Bergen. For this reason I have not separated Scarborough ware into two fabrics, but have



placed them both in the later medieval period, that is post-AD 1250.

The correct identification of medieval Saintonge ware in Perth is also a problem. Recent work on the pottery from excavations at Castle Park, Dunbar, by the Scottish Urban Archaeological Trust has shown that the later Scottish White Gritty ware industry of the Lothian region was capable of producing an evenly glazed, well-sorted, white fabric. It is possible that in the past similar material from Perth may have been wrongly identified as Saintonge ware. For this reason 150 sherds which were identified as being of Saintonge pottery have been listed here as possibly Saintonge ware. These have been placed at the end of the list of positively identified middle to later medieval fabrics.

No conclusions can be made about the importance of individual sources of pottery imported during the early medieval period as the sample is small and came from one excavation (King Edward Street). Further excavation in the earliest part of central Perth will be needed to produce a more meaningful sample.

This assemblage does, however, provide a useful body of data for comparison with the results of future excavations in Perth and elsewhere. It also supplements the list of imported wares in Scotland compiled by Thoms in 1983. When compared with the conclusions presented in Davey and Hodges (1983) and those for Aberdeen (Murray 1982) it can be seen to generally support and

Table 1. The sources used to compile Tables 2 and 3.

The sites in Perth	Source of data
Blackfriars House	Hall and MacAskill, forthcoming
Canal Street II	MacAskill <i>et al.</i> 1987
Canal Street III	Cheer, forthcoming
King Edward Street	Hall and MacAskill, forthcoming
Kirk Close	MacAskill <i>et al.</i> 1987
Kinnoull Street	Hall and MacAskill, forthcoming
Meal Vennel	Cheer, forthcoming
Mill Street	Hall and MacAskill, forthcoming
Scott Street	Cheer, in preparation
South Methven Street	MacAskill <i>et al.</i> 1987