

**A group of late 16th-century pottery excavated from pit 13 in the garden of Wells and Mendip Museum, 8 Cathedral Green, Wells, Somerset, 1992-1997**

*David Dawson, Teresa Hall and Linda Iveson*

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**A GROUP OF LATE 16TH-CENTURY POTTERY EXCAVATED  
FROM PIT 13 IN THE GARDEN OF WELLS AND MENDIP MUSEUM,  
8 CATHEDRAL GREEN, WELLS, SOMERSET, 1992-1997**

DAVID DAWSON, TERESA HALL AND LINDA IVESON

## INTRODUCTION

Five vessels are presented here together with an accompanying glass flask as one of the few stratified groups of pottery of this date recorded in the county. They are the only finds recorded from pit 13 and represent a tiny fraction of the pottery recovered from the excavations led by Simon Almy and the late Christopher Hawkes between 1992 and 1997 in advance of the works part funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to provide new reference stores and a learning space at the rear of Wells and Mendip Museum (Almy and Hawkes 1992; 1994; 1997). The 13th-/early 14th-century group from pit 6 has been published (Dawson *et al.* 2015) and a corpus of 17th- to 19th-century red earthenwares is being prepared (Dawson *et al.* forthcoming). A photograph of the pottery from pit 13 group was published in the interim report for 1995-7 (Almy and Hawkes 1997, 26). The finds can be consulted at Wells and Mendip Museum under accession numbers 1994.14.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the 16th century the property now known as the Wells and Mendip Museum was in the hands of the

Dean and Chapter (Fig. 1). An extensive examination of its complex post-medieval historical context will accompany publication of the later red earthenwares



*Fig. 1 Location of pit 13 and Wells and Mendip Museum (formerly College House) based on the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map revised in 1902.*

from pits 2, 4 and 5 (Dawson *et al.* 2015; forthcoming). There is no known documented event which might be associated with the deposition of this group.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The fill of pit 13 was sealed by the contents of pit 5, a large rectangular stone-lined sub-surface structure 0.94m deep that was infilled with two layers: the upper, domestic rubbish with building debris and containing 18th-/early 19th-century pottery; the lower, 'earth with rubble, freestone and a few pieces of architectural mouldings' (Almy and Hawkes 1994, 63 – note that the authors follow as closely as possible the numbering used in the site documentation. This differs from the various systems applied to the published reports). Pit 5 seems to have been part of a range of buildings extending eastwards, parallel to the main range fronting Cathedral Green (Fig. 2). This pit which adjoins on its north side pit 4, a vaulted cellar, lies adjacent to the western boundary wall of the plot. The upper fill of pit 5 had spilled over through a breach in the north wall into pit 4. Pit 13 which may have been originally dug as a cellar was filled with darker earth with less stone. This seems to have been levelled off at the same depth as the floor of the adjoining pit 4 implying that this was a single event associated with the extension of pit 5 into cellar pit 4 (Fig. 3).

## THE POTTERY AND GLASS

### Discussion and conclusion

The main criterion for dating the group is the presence of the two imported Rhenish stoneware drinking jugs or *krüge*. One is a typical example from Raeren (Fig. 4.2), a pottery-making centre now in the province of Liège (Belgium), 9km south of Aachen; the other (Fig. 4.3) is typical of Frechen in Nordrhein-Westfalen (Germany), 10km southwest of the riverport of Cologne (Gaimster 1997, 384, 386). The archaeological evidence in England for the rapid displacement of the trade from Raeren in favour of products of Frechen in the mid-16th century has been noted since the 1970s (Hurst *et al.* 1986, 216) and fully explored and explained by Gaimster (1997, 92-3, 209, 226). Their presence in Wells indicates a date of the second half of the 16th century. How they got here is more problematic. Examples of both types have been found elsewhere in Somerset: Raeren *krüge* 41 and 41a are recorded from the garderobe at Cleve Abbey probably deposited just after the Dissolution in 1536 and Raeren *krug* 705 from Kennedy's Yard, Taunton (Allan 1998, 50, 55; Pearson 1984, 41-2, 108, microfiche IIB12). Sherds are found on many sites of this date across the county for example

at Shapwick (Gutiérrez 2007, 665) but in their origin cannot be necessarily differentiated. The mechanisms of the trade to Exeter have been discussed by Allan (1984, 117-25) but whether the Wells examples came from London via Bristol or Exeter is a matter of surmise. The popularity of the Raeren *krug* may be reflected in its form being copied in earthenware in the Donyatt potteries (Coleman-Smith and Pearson 1988, 390).

The second criterion for dating is based on the find of fragments of a glass globular flask with an optic-blown wrythen neck (Fig. 4.6). According to Wilmott (2002, 86, 124-5) this is a common form current in the period c. 1500 to c. 1650 that has been reported from excavations elsewhere in the West Country including Exeter (nos 62, 66, 67) and Poole (no. 41) (Charleston 1982, 139; 1984, 269).

The two earthenware cups (Figs 4.4 and 5) are so far the sole examples of their fabric and form published from the region. The fabric is hard-fired and sandy with laminar structure and a glossy olive-green glaze. They are clearly of East Somerset manufacture (Wells Museum Garden fabric 100; Dawson *et al.* 2018, 34-5; forthcoming). In form they follow the general shape of two-handled cups of the late-15th/16th century such as Allan's type 6B South Somerset ware as found in an early 16th-century context in Goldsmith Street, Exeter (Allan 1984, 150, 162, nos 1753, 1751). Brears (1971, 14) cites evidence that this type of cup became common after c. 1550. Examples of two-handled cups that have been reported as ascribed by Terry Pearson to East Somerset are nos 308-17 from St Clement's Dock, Narrow Quay, Bristol. This assemblage is dated to the late 16th century, possibly post 1581 the date of the launch of the ship *Minion* (Narrow Quay BAC pit 10; Good 1987, 76-79). However, in form and appearance, a thick treacly black iron-enriched glaze, the Bristol examples are clearly copies of Cistercian-type ware and are possibly attributable to the pottery at Falfield (Gloucs) rather than the East Somerset potteries (Fowler and Bennett 1974, 124-126).

There is no comparable form recorded from the Donyatt potteries to the small jar (Fig. 4.1) which is of Wells Museum Garden fabric type 106 (Coleman-Smith and Pearson 1988; Dawson *et al.* 2018, 31-2; forthcoming).

Taken together it seems reasonable to suggest a date for the pit 13 group of c. 1550 to c. 1600, possibly as late as c. 1650. The absence of clay pipes which are abundant elsewhere from the site may strengthen the argument for a date in the late 16th century. The assemblage provides firm evidence of the making of two-handled cups in the East Somerset potteries in this period. The reason for the apparently careful burial of these six vessels remains a matter of speculation.

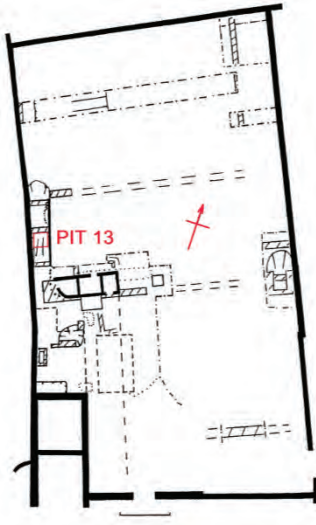


Fig. 2 Plan of the site and location of pit 13, based on a preparatory plan to that published by Almy and Hawkes: length of scale 5m.

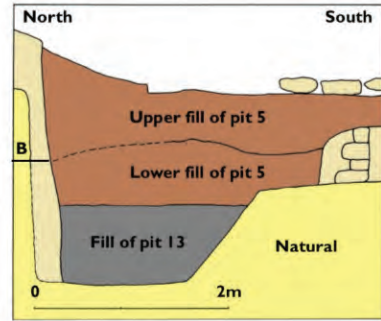


Fig. 3 Interpretation of the north to south section P30 through pit 5 and the underlying pit 13 showing the probable upper limit of the fill of pit 13 and the distinction between the two fills of pit 5. B marks the level of the breach into pit 4.



Fig. 4 Finds from pit 13 c. 1550-1600: (1) South Somerset ware jar; (2) Raeren krug; (3) Frechen krug; (4 & 5) East Somerset ware cups; (6) English glass flask

**Catalogue** (Fig. 4)

1. Jar, fabric type WMG 106 (South Somerset ware) rather soft-fired, worn and flaked internal brown lead glaze, H. 145mm. Wells and Mendip Museum accession number 1994.14/1.
2. *Krug*, Raeren salt-glazed stoneware with frilled base and separator band round belly, H. 154 mm, Gaimster type 74 (1997, 227, 386). Acc. no. 1994.14/2.
3. *Krug*, Frechen salt-glazed stoneware, H. 135 mm, Gaimster type 49 (1997, 384). Acc. no. 1994.14/3.
4. Cup, fabric type WMG 100 (East Somerset ware), globular two-handled with two incised lines round belly, all over reduced green lead glaze, H. 105 mm. Acc. no. 1994.14/4.
5. Cup, fabric type WMG 100, two-handled with all over reduced green lead glaze, H. 120 mm. Acc. no. 1994.14/5.
6. Glass flask with wrythen neck, rim, D. 61mm. Acc. no. 1994.14/7.

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## THE MID 18TH-CENTURY KILN OF THE 'POTTERY HOUSE IN THE OLD PARK', DUNSTER (HER PIN MSO9466)

DAVID DAWSON, OLIVER KENT AND BILL STEBBING

The pottery kiln surviving behind the Exmoor National Park Authority Visitor Centre at Dunster is a remarkable scheduled ancient monument (number 1020409 at SS

9924 4385). It is a simple two-firebox updraught kiln; that is, one in which the heat from the fires is distributed under the floor of the ware chamber and drawn up through the