

EXCAVATIONS AT ST GEORGE'S CHURCH, HINTON ST GEORGE

INTRODUCTION

A large capacity holding tank for sewage was to be installed beneath, and aligned with, the path around the north side of the west tower of the church. Located 3m north of the tower, this required a hole *c.* 3.2 x 1.5m, and up to 3m deep; the digging to be monitored by an archaeologist and any necessary recording carried out. This was done in early March 2000, the digging being done partly by machine and partly by hand. As expected graves were encountered, parts of seven graves lying within the area of the excavation. As far as possible in the circumstances, these were recorded *in situ* and removed archaeologically, though some disturbance by the machine did take place. All the bones recovered were subsequently reburied in the base of the excavated hole. The field record has been deposited in the County Record Office.

BURIALS

Parts of seven graves were found, clustered in the southern and eastern part of the trench. Though conditions of excavation and recording were not ideal because of the use of a machine, the absence of graves in the north-western part of the trench appeared real. Here a deep area of infill was encountered, but no human remains, suggesting the clearance of graves in this part of the graveyard, possibly in connection with the Poulett tomb of 1918 that lay just to the north-west of the trench.

The graves became apparent at a depth of about 1m below the surface of the path which lay to the north of the tower. In the shallowest grave the skeleton was encountered at 0.8m below the surface; in the deepest grave the skeleton lay at 1.5m below the surface. All the graves had been cut into the compact yellow sand which forms the top of the geological sequence in this area. Because the graves were closely spaced or even intercut, the sand was not encountered anywhere until a depth of about 0.9m (and generally deeper) was reached; above this level an undifferentiated deposit of grey-brown loam was present throughout the trench.

Where they could be defined the graves were narrow, in one case as little as 0.25m wide at the foot end, with rounded ends and base. The skeletons lay tight to the grave edges and there was no evidence of the use of coffins; presumably the corpses were simply shroud-wrapped. The skeletons lay east-west with the head at the west end of the grave; in one case the arms were crossed over the chest; in another straight along the sides of the body. Two depths of grave were found; those between 0.8 and 1m below the existing ground surface; and those at about 1.5m below. Sometimes the upper graves overlapped the lower. Redeposited human bones were only noted in one grave, however, being a deep grave in the north-east part of the trench; re-interred bones, including a skull, had been laid above the feet of the intact skeleton. There was a single instance of the probable re-use of a grave; in the south-east corner of the trench a skeleton at 0.8m below the surface lay on a layer of small stone rubble in the grave, beneath which was another skeleton, at a depth of 1.1m. The coincidence of the skeleton positions strongly suggested the re-use of the grave, the two burials being deliberately separated by a bed of stone rubble upon which the later corpse was laid.

It was possible to recognise three rows of graves; a single deep row across the central part of the trench, with two later rows of shallower graves overlapping it to east and west. The alignment of all the graves appeared consistent, but was noticeably out of line with the present church. Compared to the east-west line of the church, the graves appeared to be more west-north-west to east-south-east. All the skeletons were adult, but no details could be recorded. Sufficient variation in the bones was, however, observed during their removal, to indicate the presence of both male and female skeletons.

The evidence for the date of the graves comprises a number of sherds of pottery dated to the medieval period. These were recovered from the western part of the trench, above the recognised graves in the undifferentiated upper fills of the features. No later material was found. This, together with the nature of the graves, suggests a medieval date, almost certainly pre-dating the construction of the tower *c.* 1500. It is interesting that the area does not appear to have been used for burials after the tower's construction.

THE MEDIEVAL POTTERY Richard Coleman-Smith

Nine sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from the excavation, all from the layer of undifferentiated infill above the defined graves in the south-west part of the trench. None could be attributed to the infill of any specific grave and all the sherds are likely to have been discarded in the graveyard before their incorporation into the infilling of the graves. They are all of 14th-century date.

Not surprisingly, seven of the nine sherds are from the Donyatt Pottery Site 2, located in Whitney Bottom (Coleman-Smith and Pearson 1988, 56–61). Unfortunately no kiln was found relating to this ware but residual 14th-century material was found in a gully (DF7) which exactly matches the fabric of the seven sherds under discussion.

The fabric of all seven is the same (Coleman-Smith and Pearson 1988, 102, Donyatt pottery type DPT 2) being a fairly hard fabric with slightly gritty textured surfaces. Inclusions consist of rounded and sharp quartz grits, making this fabric unsuitable for throwing, but able to withstand the variable firing temperatures of a clamp firing. The most significant form in this fabric is made up of four large sherds comprising the following (Fig. 1):

1a. Rim, shoulder and bridged spout of a spouted pitcher, a hitherto unrecorded form from Donyatt, though recorded in the same fabric at Exeter (Allan 1984, 72, fig. 33, no. 972). This Exeter example is also hand coiled and displays the same idiosyncratically shaped bridged spout. Combed decoration is found on both the Hinton St George and Exeter examples, although the Exeter example of this fabric (*ibid.* fig. 33, no. 977) has horizontal wavy combing on the body, whereas the example under discussion has two widely separate, combed wavy horizontal bands with a series of roughly vertical combed wavy bands between them. The spout is also combed vertically, and the rim has a wavy band around its upper surface. The glazed exterior surfaces are unevenly applied with a patchy, amber-green, lead earthenware glaze, flecked with brown iron, a glaze commonly in use at Donyatt at this date. The vessel is unglazed internally and fired in a strongly reducing kiln atmosphere rendering the fabric a dark grey tone.

1b. This is a conjectural reconstruction of a spouted pitcher of this type; a well-known form originating in early medieval times.

The most significant fact to emerge from the examination of this fabric is that it indicates that this ware was reaching the Exeter markets by the 14th century. Donyatt fabric DPT 2 is very similar to Exeter Fabric 60, if not the same, remembering that quantities of grit to clay would be empirically added by the potter.

2–4 (no. 4 not illustrated). Are all sherds from different cooking pots made in the same fabric as 1. They are all hand coiled and wheel smoothed. All have reddish-grey surfaces with thick grey cores and show evidence of being used over an open fire. Fabric DPT 2; no glaze has been used on them.

5 and 6. Both sherds are products of the Ham Green kilns, situated north-west of Bristol and supplying that town in the 13th century (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, 343–4, nos 1407–15). Both these sherds are made in a sandy grey fabric with internal buff surfaces and are glazed externally with a patchy, amber-green, lead earthenware glaze. Each of the sherds are body sherds of globular form, probably from large pitchers. Sherd 5 has been decorated externally with horizontal bands of rouletted trellis pattern; sherd 6

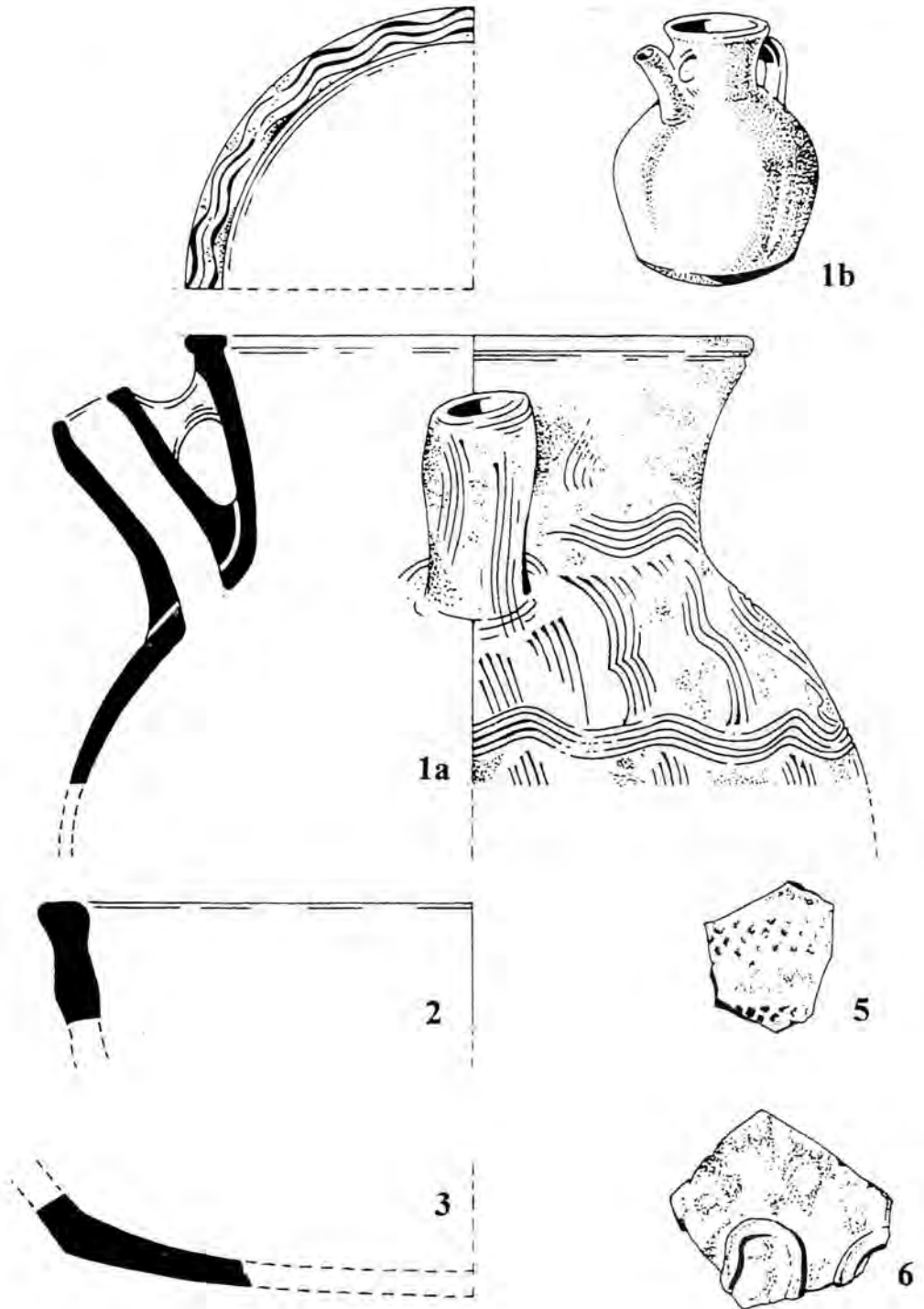


Fig. 1 Medieval pottery; scale 1:2

has been decorated with a wavy, serpentine applied strip. Both decorative methods used on the two sherds are common on Ham Green ware. These finds of Ham Green ware are the nearest examples of this ware to the Donyatt kilns so far found but it has long been known that the Ham Green wares influenced the designs made at Donyatt.

In conclusion, it can be stated that these pottery finds emphasise the fact that pottery travelled more widely than one might first expect, and the free exchange of ideas, if not potters, was more common than we suppose.

CONCLUSIONS

The work revealed a well-preserved area of a medieval graveyard, with no disturbance by later graves, apart from that connected with the Poulett tomb. The uncoffined burials were characteristic of a medieval graveyard in use over a number of centuries. Within the constraints of the area excavated, there was a sense of order; the graves were in rows and though closely spaced there was little evidence of the disturbance of earlier bones. A number of details were observed of the burial rites; the graves were narrow to receive the shrouded bodies and there was one instance of probable grave re-use with a layer of stones used to separate the two corpses.

What may be exceptional is that following the construction of the tower, this area of the graveyard appears to have gone out of use, perhaps because a path to the north of the tower was established soon after its construction. Later graves, including the Poulett tomb mentioned above, lie specifically to the north of this path.

The date of the revealed graves is not precise. Though they are likely to predate the construction of the tower, the amount by which they may do so is unclear, as is the range of date that they might represent. Pottery recovered from the general infill above the graves has been dated to the 14th century, so the graves are probably contemporary with the known church of the 13th and 14th century, predating the present structure which is largely 15th and 16th century.

REFERENCES

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