

MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL OCCUPATION AT MILLBROOK MEWS, MILBORNE PORT

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Following an evaluation in 2005 which had revealed evidence for medieval and post-medieval occupation at Millbrook Mews, Milborne Port, an excavation was carried out in April 2008 by Wessex Archaeology (WA) on land proposed for development by the Cavanna Group (WA 2005; 2009). The site covered *c.* 0.3ha (NGR 367545 118784) in the centre of Milborne Port and is bordered to the east by Pope's Lane, to the south by Rosemary Street, to the west by the now canalised Higher Kingsbury Stream and to the north by an area of open ground south of West Hill (Fig. 1). The eastern part of the site lies on the valley side, which drops from *c.* 78m to *c.* 76m above Ordnance Datum (aOD) on the flat valley floor; the western part lies wholly on the valley floor. The underlying geology comprises Inferior Oolitic Limestone of Jurassic age, overlain by alluvium on the valley floor (BGS 1977).

Milborne Port has its origins in the Late Saxon period when it was part of a large royal estate, its importance reflected in the recorded presence of a mint in the 10th and 11th centuries and a minster church. By the time Domesday Book was compiled in 1086, it was the third largest of six boroughs recorded in Somerset, having the second most valuable pre-Conquest market (Aston 1984, 185; Richardson 2003, 6).

An archaeological evaluation in 1989 adjacent to Church Street, *c.* 250m to the south-east of the site, revealed features, including pits, postholes, gullies

and a ditch dating to the 11th–12th centuries, as well as some evidence of post-medieval activity (WA 1989; Smith 2003).

The town achieved the suffix 'Port' by 1249, suggesting it was a successful trading centre, but it declined during the later medieval period, losing trade to the neighbouring towns of Sherborne, Yeovil and Wincanton. As with many of the small towns of south Somerset, the cloth industry augmented a rural, agricultural economy during the medieval and post-medieval periods. The 1327 Lay Subsidy records fullers, dyers and tailors amongst the 30 tax payers; and 21 tanners, fellmongers and curriers are known to have been in business between 1671 and 1782 (Baggs and Siraut 1999; Richardson 2003, 3). By 1781 there were four weaving sheds within the town producing flax and sailcloth, but this industry was replaced by tanning and glove production, with up to seven glove-making businesses recorded in the first half of the 19th century (Richardson 2003, 3–4).

A manorial map of 1781–2 shows three buildings in the southern part of the site, but these had disappeared by the time of the 1st edition OS map of 1884–7. To the north of the site, at West Hill, J. Henning established the first glove factory in 1810. Ensor's tannery was established on the same site and these were joined in 1858 by Silas Dyke's glove factory which closed in 1984. The modern tannery, which until recently lay north of the site, first appears on the OS map of 1962 and was probably an extension of the Ensor tannery and factory; it closed in the 1990s and was demolished, and in 2005 the

tannery pits were filled in (Baggs and Siraut 1999; Richardson 2003, 11).

RESULTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN 2008

The purpose of the excavation was to establish the nature, extent, character and chronology of the medieval and post-medieval features identified during the evaluation (Trenches 1 and 2) and to ascertain whether remains of other structures, shown on the 1781–2 manorial map, were still present. An area of *c.* 0.17ha was uncovered during the excavation, subdivided into Areas 1 and 2 (Figs 1 and 2). Additionally, the profile of the former water channel of the now canalised Higher Kingsbury Stream was investigated with a line of eight auger holes in Area 2.

Area 1

Area 1 was positioned on the valley side to investigate the post-medieval building identified in evaluation trench 1 (Fig. 1). Three phases of archaeological deposits and structures were recorded above the natural limestone geology which in the eastern half of the area was overlain by colluvium 4003. The two earliest phases in Area 1 were only recorded in slot 4054.

Phase 1.1

The western edge of the colluvium was marked by a wide, north–south aligned terrace (4124) cutting the bedrock on the valley slope. The terrace had a steep to vertical eastern side, and was excavated to a depth of 1.1m without its base being reached. The nature and function of this terrace remain unclear, but it may have been to allow building to be continued along the gently sloping valley side. The lowest recorded fill was a very organic layer containing 13th or early 14th-century pottery and iron-smithing slag.

Phase 1.2

The organic layer in slot 4054 was sealed by a thick layer of redeposited clayey silt, the result, possibly, of either deliberate levelling or cultivation. Although most of the pottery from this layer was medieval, the presence of post-medieval redwares suggests that

this infilling of the terrace probably occurred in the 17th century. This layer also contained numerous animal bone fragments.

Phase 1.3

Two shallow ditches (4013 and 4106) at 90° to each other cut the material filling the terrace and contained late 18th-century pottery as well as residual medieval sherds and fragments of iron-smithing slag. Ditch 4013 closely followed the eastern edge of the earlier, infilled terrace 4124. These ditches were probably associated with a post-medieval stone building (Building 1) which was partly revealed at the southern end of Area 1. The building stood on a rectangular platform (4006), measuring 14m by at least 6.7m and up to 0.7m deep, which cut through the fill of the terrace, in places down to the limestone bedrock (Fig. 1). Some of the rubble material (4012) excavated from the platform appears to have been dumped upslope, to the east.

Parts of two walls (4007/4008 and 4009) survived, their junction matching almost precisely the position of the north-east corner of a building shown on the 1781–2 manorial map. The walls were built of unworked limestone blocks set in a sandy clay mortar, sitting directly on the limestone bedrock. Late 18th-century (or later) pottery was recovered from the fabric of wall 4009. The *c.* 1m gap between the walls and the edge of the platform became partly filled with soil during the life of the building.

Several layers were recorded inside Building 1. A coal-rich spread (4010) lay directly on the natural limestone suggesting that the bedrock formed the initial floor. While the spread is indicative of some pyrotechnical process, the absence of iron slag or hammerscale rules out smithing in the initial use of the building. This layer was partly sealed by the lower (4011) of two layers of rammed clay, the upper of which (4063) contained early 19th-century pottery and three small fragments of iron-smithing slag. These clay layers appear to have been used as floors, rather than bedding layers, as no ceramic floor tiles or stone flags were observed either *in situ* or within the building's demolition layer.

The building was eventually demolished almost to floor level, with dumps of debris (4005) overlying the remains of the walls and floors, sealed by post-demolition layer 4104 (not shown on plan). This demolition material produced 161 sherds of pottery including approximately half of the post-medieval

assemblage as well as half a smithing hearth bottom.

A number of pits of varying sizes (4015, 4026, 4029, 4033, 4085, 4089, 4095 and 4111) contained domestic waste comprising post-medieval/modern pottery (and some residual medieval pottery), animal bone, coal and clinker. The pits were probably all contemporary with Building 1, and the animal bone waste recovered from some of them (especially 4026, 4029 and 4095) suggests that light tanning was carried out on site. Circular pit 4029 was clay-lined and possibly had a barrel set within it; while such a pit would be useful in the processing of animal skins (see Higbee, below), no mineralised remains indicative of tanning were recovered from the environmental samples and the pit appears instead to have been used as a dump for burnt grain.

Area 2

Area 2 (Fig. 2), on the valley floor, was positioned to investigate the site of another building shown on the 1781–2 manorial map. Although no building remains had been recorded in evaluation trench 2 which had been excavated to a depth of 1.2m, deposits containing medieval finds had been recorded below 1.6m in a 2.3m deep slot extending south from the centre of the trench (WA 2005).

The earliest observed feature was the edge of the former stream channel, cutting the natural clay (4019) near the eastern edge of Area 2. An east–west transect of eight auger holes revealed the profile of the channel which continued the slope of the valley’s eastern side; its deepest point (in auger hole 3) was over 3m below the current ground surface, at 72.5m aOD (WA 2009, Appendix 1). The channel was filled with a series of organic, possibly water-lain deposits, some of which contained 12th to 14th-century pottery and small amounts of iron-smithing slag probably dumped into boggy areas of the valley floor.

Cutting these deposits, *c.* 1.4m below the current ground level, were the foundation trenches for a stone building (Building 2). It is likely that the building postdated the canalisation of the stream as this would have helped to drain the adjacent ground. The channel deposits, therefore, provide a *terminus post quem* of at least the 14th century for the building’s construction, following which several further phases of construction and demolition took place. The position of the building, as suggested by the excavated walls, lies to the immediate east of

that depicted in the 1781–2 map, and extends further to the north.

Phase 2.1

The first phase of building comprised a north–south wall (4049 at the south and 4024 at the north, but partly truncated by later wall 4053). No associated floor surfaces were observed. Two other north–south aligned walls may have been associated with it, but the relationships could not be clarified. Wall 4084 lay *c.* 3m to the west of wall 4049 but was not investigated further because it lay below the proposed construction level. To the north, and aligned *c.* 2m to the east of wall 4024/4049, was the drystone foundation of wall 4042/4069, whose slightly irregular line, apparently following the contours at the edge of the valley, suggests it may have been a boundary or garden wall, rather than part of a building. The only dating evidence came from a spread of mortar (4070) adjacent to and above this wall, containing 13th/14th-century pottery.

Phase 2.2

Wall 4048, which had a stepped foundation on its western side, was subsequently bonded on to the western side of wall 4049, to strengthen the cracked and slumping earlier wall. Organic deposits, such as 4060 (below mortar spread 4059), possibly caused by sustained waterlogged conditions, continued to accumulate during this phase between walls 4048 and 4084 on the west side of the building. These deposits, and 4100 further east, contained pottery of medieval and post-medieval date as well as iron-smithing slag, indicating use of the building in the late 18th century.

Phase 2.3

This phase saw the demolition of the Phase 2.1 walls in the form of rubble layer 4039/4040 deriving from wall 4024. Following this, another north–south wall (4053) was built, bonded to wall 4048 and turning to the east at its north end as wall 4023 (overlying Phase 2.1 wall 4024). Wall 4102, to the east, may have been the continuation of wall 4023, with wall 4101 running south from its eastern end, creating a *c.* 4m wide room which may have been at least 10m long. Another north–south wall (4126) was recorded *c.* 1m further east, but its function remains unclear.

These changes were short-lived and at the end of this phase all the standing walls were demolished,

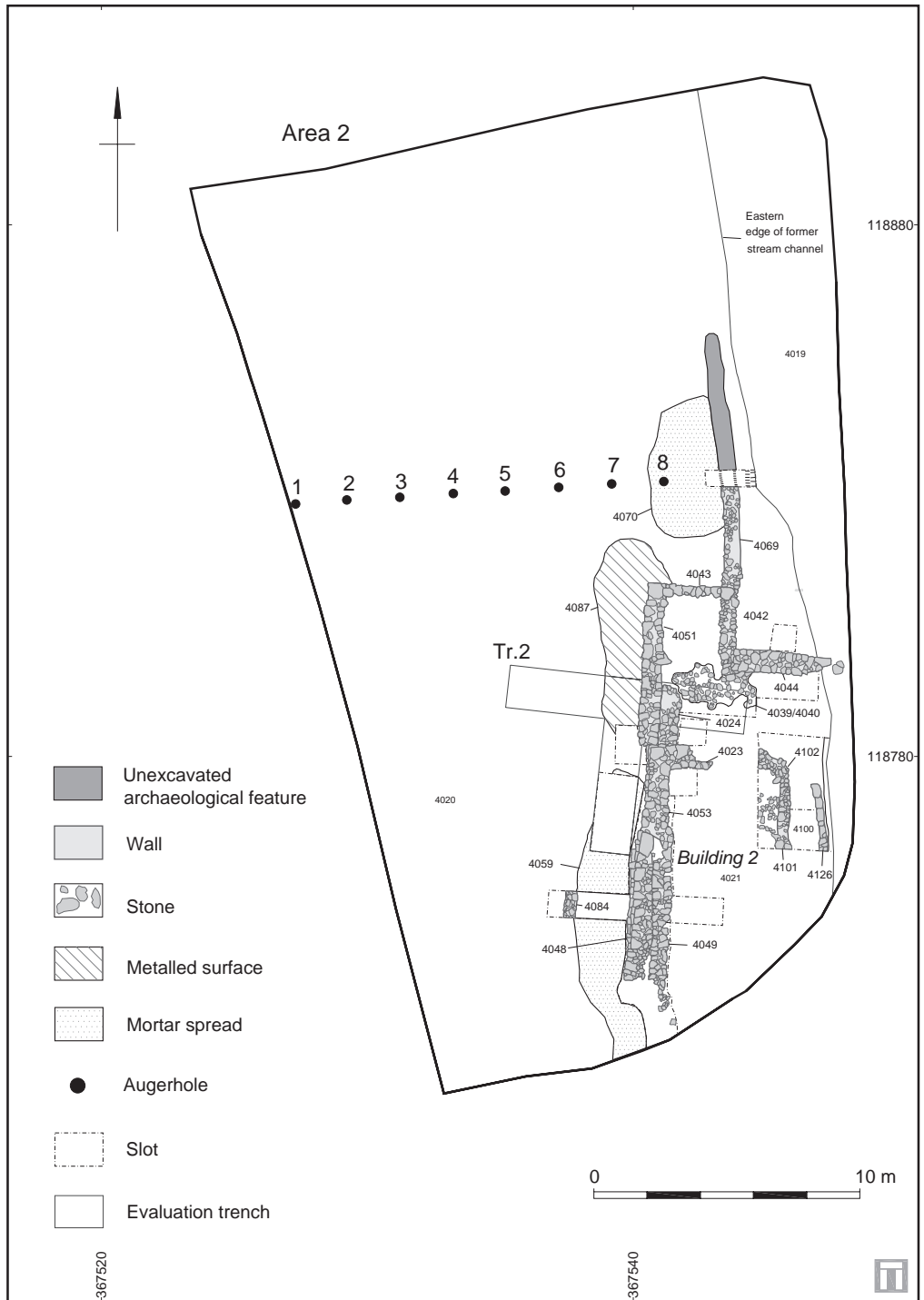


Fig. 2 Plan of archaeological features in Area 2

and any associated floor surfaces apparently removed. Mortar layer 4059, possibly from the cleaning of the demolished stonework for re-use, was dumped to the west of walls 4048 and 4053 (over layer 4060).

The area then appears to have remained unoccupied for some length of time, and there was a c. 0.4m-thick build-up of at least five layers of silty clay (only 4021 shown on plan) within the former Building 2, overlying its demolished walls. These layers contained pottery of medieval and post-medieval date, nearly 9kg of slag and some hearth lining. The unabraded nature of the slag, including five hearth bottoms, indicates the likelihood of some iron smithing on site or in the vicinity in the post-medieval period.

Phase 2.4

The final phase of building saw the construction of walls 4051, 4043 and 4044, all of which overlay deposit 4021. These appear, therefore, not to have been associated with the earlier structure(s), despite having the same alignment. A metallated surface of rough limestone blocks (4087) to the north-west of walls 4051 and 4043 may represent an external yard associated with this phase of building, the extent of which remains uncertain. A probably post-medieval small, D-shaped copper alloy buckle was found in wall 4043. After this final phase of building was demolished and most of the stone removed, a mixed deposit of organic silty clay (4020) accumulated in the still relatively wet conditions on the valley floor, sealing the upper levels of archaeology; this deposit contained post-medieval, late 18th-century and later pottery and iron-smithing slag. Below the topsoil, there was 1.2m of modern made ground, probably deposited at the start of the 19th century to raise ground levels in an area prone to flooding, prior to the establishment of the glove factory to the north of the site.

FINDS

Pottery by *Lorraine Mepharm*

Medieval pottery

The complete pottery assemblage from the site comprises 887 sherds (11,395g) and includes material of medieval and post-medieval date; the medieval assemblage comprises 573 sherds (5236g).

A high proportion of this medieval material occurred as redeposited sherds in post-medieval contexts, and this is reflected in the condition of the assemblage. Although relatively unabraded (the fabrics are hard-firing), the assemblage is fragmentary; there were very few joining sherds, and no profiles could be reconstructed. Mean sherd weight is 9.1g.

The assemblage has been analysed following the standard Wessex Archaeology (WA) recording system for pottery (Morris 1994), which accords with minimum guidelines for post-Roman pottery (MPRG 2001). Fabrics have been defined on the basis of the size, range and frequency of macroscopic inclusions, and coded by dominant inclusion type within three broad groups: calcareous (Group C), flint-tempered (Group F) and sandy (Group Q). There are also some fabrics that correspond to known (or 'established') regional types (Group E). Fabric totals are given in Table 1, and correlations are given to types identified within a previously published assemblage from Milborne Port (Blinkhorn 2003).

Fabrics and forms

Thirteen fabric types have been defined: two calcareous, one flint-tempered and ten sandy (of which three are known regional types). There are, however, overlaps between the groups, as some of the sandy wares also contain flint.

Flint-tempered wares (fabric F400) probably represent the earliest material here, but occurred only sporadically (3% of the assemblage by sherd count). These flint-tempered wares contain prominent, poorly-sorted, patinated flint inclusions. The only diagnostic sherds are two everted jar rims with simple profiles.

Sandy coarsewares dominate the assemblage (fabrics Q401, Q402; 69% of the assemblage). These vary in coarseness, and most contain rare to sparse flint inclusions (although not as coarse or as frequent as the early medieval flint-tempered wares), and/or rare to sparse, fine calcareous (chalk/limestone) inclusions. It is likely that this group includes the products of more than one source, but most if not all were probably made within the local area (ie within 20 miles of the site). There are no overall profiles, but rim sherds appear to belong almost exclusively to jar forms (48 examples); and many of these have the convex, 'cupped' neck profiles which appeared c. 1200 across Somerset and Devon (eg Allan 1984, 4). Two rims could be from bowls or dishes, and there is also one tubular handle from

TABLE 1: MEDIEVAL POTTERY TOTALS BY WARE TYPE

Fabric Code	Description	No. Sherds	Weight (g)
C400	Oolitic-tempered ware (Blinkhorn type F4)	53	382
C401	Finer sandy/oolitic-tempered ware	24	308
E421	Laverstock-type fineware	6	65
E422	Laverstock-type coarseware	6	40
E481	Ham Green ware	1	7
F400	Coarse, flint-tempered ware (Blinkhorn type F1)	18	198
Q400	Medium to fine-grained sandy ware (Blinkhorn type F5)	52	432
Q401	Sandy/flint-tempered ware (Blinkhorn type F1/F2)	78	818
Q402	Finer sandy ware with rare to sparse flint and/or chalk/limestone (Blinkhorn type F2)	319	2812
Q403	Wheelthrown sandy ware, glazed	1	16
Q404	Fine, smooth sandy ware (Blinkhorn type F3)	13	147
Q405	Fine-grained sandy ware, glazed	1	6
Q406	Fine-grained sandy ware, glazed	1	5
	Total	573	5236

a skillet, with multiple comb-tooth impressions (an alternative interpretation as a tubular pitcher spout is less likely). A few sherds are glazed, and these are assumed to derive from jug or pitcher forms; one has applied strip decoration.

Finer sandy wares have no other coarse inclusions (fabrics Q400, Q404); these make up 11% of the assemblage. A small proportion of the sherds seen here are glazed, and diagnostic sherds include rims from both jars and jugs.

Oolitic-tempered wares, comprising one coarse fabric (C400), and a sandy variant (C401), account for 13% of the assemblage. These wares are likely to represent very localised manufacture – Milborne Port lies on Inferior Oolite, and oolitic wares have not been recorded on other sites in the area such as Sherborne Old Castle. Diagnostic sherds are limited to one ‘cupped’ jar rim, and a glazed body sherd with combed decoration, possibly from a tripod pitcher of late 11th/12th-century date.

Regional sources are represented by a few fine, glazed sherds from the Salisbury area, comparable to the 13th-century Laverstock kiln products (fabric E421); two joining sherds come from a green-glazed jug decorated with applied, stamped pads. Six coarseware sherds are also of Laverstock type (fabric E422), but may predate the kilns excavated there; they include two glazed sherds, one with applied strips in a lattice design, which could come from late 11th/12th-century tripod pitchers.

One glazed sherd of Bristol Ham Green ware was identified (E481), while three sherds of fine, glazed, sandy ware (Q403, Q405, Q406) are as yet unattributed to source. None are diagnostic.

Chronology and affinities

The assemblage from Millbrook Mews finds parallels at various sites across the region although, as already noted, oolitic wares, recorded elsewhere in the town (WA 1989; Blinkhorn 2003), appear to be very localised in manufacture and distribution.

Similar flint-tempered wares have been identified at Sherborne (Harrison and Williams 1979, fabric group A; Mephram 1995, fabric Q430), and at Meadow Vale Farm, near Wincanton (Newman *et al.* 1994, fabrics F400, F401; note that WA fabric types do not directly equate between sites), and form part of a widespread regional ceramic tradition with a currency from at least the 11th through to the 13th century. A source has previously been suggested in the Ilchester area (Pearson 1982, 169–80), but chemical analysis on samples from Sherborne has more recently shown that the inclusions used in these wares are predominantly Upper Greensand-derived, and that manufacture in the area of the Blackdown Hills, to the south-west, is more likely (Allan 2003; Allan *et al.* 2010).

Coarse sandy and sandy/flint-tempered wares again form part of a widespread ceramic tradition but probably based on localised production centres; parallels can be found in the immediate area of the Somerset/Dorset border at Sherborne Old Castle (Mephram 1995, fabrics Q400–Q403, Q406), Meadow Vale Farm near Wincanton (Newman *et al.* 1994, fabrics Q404–Q408), along the route of the Bowden to Henstridge water pipeline (WA 1991), and at Kington Magna (Ross 1985, fabric D26). Comparable wares have also been recorded at Stoke-sub-Hamdon (Mephram 1992, fabrics Q400–Q402), Ilchester (Pearson 1982) and the Wincanton Bypass

(Ellison and Pearson 1981, 202–3), and the range of coarsewares known from excavations in Warminster in Wiltshire, thought to be local products, includes similar examples (Smith 1997). To the south of Milborne Port, a number of documentary references to medieval pottery production exist, forming an arc running the length of the Blackmore Vale (Spoerry 1988, 34), and this could provide potential source(s) for some of these coarsewares.

The finer sandy wares are of a type found across west Dorset and probably including products of the 13th-century kiln at Hermitage in the north of the county (Field 1966), although the range of forms seen elsewhere, for example at Sherborne, suggests that production continued into the later medieval period. It is, however, also possible that the sandy wares seen at Millbrook Mews include products of the Donyatt production centre in Somerset, of which the earliest excavated kilns are dated to the 13th century (Coleman-Smith and Pearson 1988).

According to the ceramic phasing suggested for medieval pottery from previous excavations in the town (WA 1989; Blinkhorn 2003), the sequence begins, possibly pre-Conquest, with oolitic-tempered wares, accompanied and gradually superseded (12th/early13th century) by flint-tempered wares. Sandy wares emerge later, and dominate from the 13th century. This ceramic phasing is based on that suggested for other well-stratified assemblages in the region, such as Sherborne Old Castle and Ilchester (Harrison and Williams 1979; Mephram 1995; Pearson 1982). Given the paucity of medieval pottery from Millbrook Mews found well stratified in medieval contexts (see below), little can be added to this suggested sequence, except to point out that the oolitic wares, on the basis of the single ‘cupped’ rim, do appear to have continued in use longer than originally thought, and certainly into the early 13th century.

Distribution

As already observed, very little of the medieval pottery actually derived from stratified medieval deposits. Most came from Area 2 (443 sherds), but the largest groups were associated with the demolition of the phase 3 building, and later deposits.

The earliest (phase 1) deposits in Area 1 related to terrace 4124; the lowest fill of this terrace produced seven sherds of medieval pottery, in a range of fabrics but including a glazed Laverstock-type fineware of 13th or early 14th-century date. The subsequent backfill of the terrace contained post-

medieval as well as medieval sherds. In Area 2, most of the excavated fills of the former stream channel, stratigraphically preceding the phase 1 building, contained only medieval sherds, again including Laverstock-type fineware, and also ‘cupped’ jar rims; a single small post-medieval sherd from stream channel fill 4067 may be intrusive here.

The nature of the activity that resulted in the deposition of the medieval assemblage is therefore uncertain, although it seems likely that material relates to activity in the near vicinity of the site. The presence of ironworking debris suggests that this was at least partly industrial in nature, although there is nothing within the pottery assemblage to suggest anything other than a purely domestic function. The date range appears to focus on the 12th to 13th centuries, although some material may date as early as the 11th century. There is nothing that can be definitively dated later than the late 13th/early 14th century.

Post-medieval pottery

The post-medieval assemblage comprised 314 sherds (4958g) (Table 2). Amongst the post-medieval wares coarse earthenwares predominate, and these include Verwood types from east Dorset, as well as redwares (some of which are slip-decorated). The latter again may include Donyatt products, but there are also more local potential sources, including Holnest in north Dorset, for which there are documentary references from the 17th century (Spoerry 1988, 32). The coarse earthenwares are not closely datable within the post-medieval period, although the Verwood wares are likely to postdate the mid 18th century, the point at which these wares began to dominate the coarseware market across Wessex, in the face of competition from other sources. More useful for dating are the

TABLE 2: POST-MEDIEVAL POTTERY TOTALS
BY WARE TYPE

Description	No. Sherds	Weight (g)
Verwood-type earthenware	90	2,670
Redware	108	1,668
Staffs-type slipware	3	12
White saltglaze	1	1
Basalt ware	1	6
Bone china	5	14
Refined redware	1	1
Refined whiteware	96	492
Stoneware	9	94
Total	314	4958

finer wares – Staffordshire-type slipware and white salt-glaze from the later 17th/early 18th century, and refined redwares and whitewares and other factory-produced wares from the late 18th century and later.

Approximately half of the post-medieval assemblage came from demolition deposit 4005, and overall the majority of post-medieval sherds came from contexts in Area 1 (259 out of a total of 314 sherds).

Slag by *Samantha Rubinson*

A total of 11.9kg of metallurgical debris was recovered from the excavation at Millbrook Mews. This included ten smithing hearth bottoms, weighing c. 5kg, 0.6kg of hearth lining, and 0.1kg of possible smelting slag. Just over 25% (c. 3kg) of the total slag assemblage came from contexts dated as medieval, with the remainder from post-medieval contexts. Approximately 60% of the assemblage came from post-medieval deposit 4097 in Area 2. This included five smithing hearth bottoms, weighing c. 4kg, and 90% of the hearth lining. The pieces from 4097 are in noticeably good, unabraded condition and, if redeposited here, have clearly not been subject to much post-depositional movement. This is also true of the smithing slag from other contexts, and there is sufficient evidence here to postulate iron smithing was carried out in the immediate area. However, no smithing hearths or areas of heavily burned surfaces were found during the excavation. There are two pieces of bloomery iron-smelting slag also present in the assemblage. These are most likely the products of medieval smelting but found residually in later contexts. However, lacking any other evidence of smelting on the site it is unlikely that iron smelting occurred in the immediate area.

Animal bone by *Lorraine Higbee*

The assemblage comprises 1633 fragments (or 16.816kg) of animal bone from medieval, post-medieval and modern contexts. This figure is a raw count and once conjoins are taken into account the total falls to 1560 (Table 3). Intra and inter-site comparisons have not been attempted due to the generally small size of the assemblages from each period (see Hambleton 1999, 39–40). Likewise the small amount of zooarchaeologically significant information (eg age, biometric and butchery) available from the assemblage is considered

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF IDENTIFIED SPECIMENS PRESENT (OR NISP)

Species	medieval	post-medieval	modern	Total
cattle	48	60	62	170
sheep/goat	30	78	54	162
sheep		12	4	16
goat	1			1
pig	7	12	9	28
horse	2	4	5	11
dog	1	2	1	4
cat	1			1
domestic fowl	2	10	3	15
goose		3		3
<i>Total identified</i>	92	181	138	411
large mammal	72	78	110	260
medium mammal	22	112	56	190
bird	1	4		5
fish	1			1
mammal	112	491	90	693
<i>Total unidentified</i>	208	685	166	1149
<i>Overall Total</i>	300	866	303	1560

NB: Dog ABG from post-medieval pit [4026] includes 113 frags but is counted as one specimen

insufficient for interpretation purposes but is detailed in the site archive together with a more comprehensive version of this report.

Results

Medieval

A total of 300 bone fragments were recovered from medieval contexts, of which only 92 fragments (or c. 31%) were identifiable to species and elements. Cattle and sheep bones are common (52% and 33% NISP respectively) and the body part data indicates local slaughter and consumption with no obvious separate waste from different processes (eg primary butchery and domestic refuse). Other identified species included goat, pig, domestic fowl, dog and cat.

Post-medieval

The post-medieval assemblage comprised 866 fragments, of which 181 (or 21%) were identifiable to species and element. Sheep bones were common (50% NISP) and at least eleven individuals were represented. The body part data indicated a bias towards foot bones (ie metapodia and phalanges) and cranial fragments, including horn cores. The vast majority of these bone elements were from pits

4026, 4029 and 4095 in Area 1. Accumulations of these elements are typical of the waste generated by light tanning industries.

Cattle bones were also quite numerous (33% NISP) and as with the sheep bone assemblage there was a slight over-abundance of particular body parts (ie foot bones). It is highly likely therefore that at least some heavy tanning was also being carried out.

A small number of pig, horse, dog, domestic fowl and goose bones were also present. Interestingly, all of the horse bones recovered from the site were from the foot, which suggests that horsehides were occasionally processed on site. Similar evidence has been noted for other industrial assemblages (see for example Harman 1996).

Of note is the semi-complete skeleton of a puppy (age *c.* 5–7 months) from pit 4026. Evidence that fur-bearing animals, such as dogs were occasional processed at tanning sites has been noted elsewhere (see Harman 1996); however, in the absence of skinning marks it seems more likely that this particular animal was simply discarded into a convenient pit (see Thomas 2005).

Modern

A total of 303 fragments of animal bone were recovered from modern contexts, of which 46% were identifiable to species and element. Cattle and sheep bones were common (45% and 39% respectively) and the body part data was similar to that from the preceding period. This suggests either that the tanning industry continued to operate or that surface accumulations of waste from the earlier industry were re-deposited by later activity. Other identified species from the modern assemblage include pig, horse, dog and domestic fowl.

Discussion and conclusion

A small but well-preserved assemblage of animal bone was recovered from the site. The most significant groups were those from post-medieval pits 4026, 4029 and 4095, which represent industrial waste from the processing of sheepskins (ie light tanning). Light tanning involves several different stages; the skins are usually limed, dehaired, washed and then trampled in a barrel with oil or alum to produce light coloured (or white) leather (Yeomans 2007, 99). The process is technically different from heavy tanning (for detail see Albarella 2003); it is also less noxious and requires fewer resources (ie access to water), which means that light tanning industries were less restricted in terms of their

location within urban centres. Documentary and archaeological evidence all indicate that when a skin was supplied to the tanning industry the extremities (ie parietal part of the skull, with horns attached, and feet) of the skeleton were left within the skin (Thomas 1981, 162; Serjeantson 1989; Cherry 1991, 295; Shaw 1996, 107). Serjeantson (1989, 139–40) has suggested that tanners could establish the age of the animal from their horns and since the hides of younger animals produce higher quality leather and therefore a greater return than the hides from more mature animals, these were more in demand. An alternative explanation is that the horns and feet were simply left attached to the skin because they are useful during the tanning process (eg for hanging and stretching; see Yeomans 2007, 111). Despite the relatively small size of the assemblage, the character of some of the deposits supports the general theory that the site was used for industrial purposes during the post-medieval period.

CONCLUSION

The excavations at Millbrook Mews represent the largest single area yet investigated at Milborne Port. Evidence for the start of activity on the site dates back at least to the 12th century, indicated by the relatively large pottery assemblage. There are, however, no unambiguous structures of medieval date apart from a substantial terrace cut into the eastern side of the valley. This and the infilling of the former channel of the Higher Kingsbury Stream both appear to have occurred by the 14th century, and the date for the channel deposits provides a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the earliest walls associated with Building 2. The analysis of the animal bone assemblage suggests local slaughter and consumption of predominantly cattle and sheep. While the presence of iron slag indicates that iron smithing was carried out in the vicinity, no structures associated with metallurgical processes were identified on site.

Partly coinciding with economic decline between the later 16th and later 17th centuries (Baggs and Siraut 1999), there is nothing in the finds assemblage to indicate occupation between the 14th and 17th centuries, and it was not possible to clarify the exact construction dates of the two stone buildings on the valley floor. While the location of Building 1 in the eastern part of the site corresponded closely with the position of a small building on the manorial map of 1781–2, Building 2 was found slightly further east

than the position marked on the map, which may be due to an error during surveying for the compilation of the map.

The analysis of the slag and animal bone assemblages suggests a difference in the emphasis of industrial activities being carried out in the two areas during the post-medieval period. The animal remains recovered from many of the pits in Area 1 indicate that light tanning as well as limited – more noxious – heavy tanning was predominantly carried out in the eastern part of the site, while the layers containing smithing slag and hearth bottoms in Building 2 are indicative of iron smithing. It was, however, not possible to locate the focus of this activity as at neither was hammerscale retrieved, which might have located the position of the anvil, nor was there any evidence of a smithing hearth or other pyrotechnical installation.

The post-medieval industrial activities identified at Millbrook Mews are likely to be the immediate precursors to the large scale expansion of tanning, glove making and other leather industries at the beginning of the 19th century.

Archive

The project archive will be deposited with Somerset County Museum Service, Taunton under Accession Code TTNCM 8/2008.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by the Cavanna Group and would like to thank John Dooley and David Jones for their assistance during the project. Steve Membury of Somerset County Council monitored the field work and his help during the course of the project is also gratefully acknowledged. The fieldwork was directed by Steve Thompson assisted by Ollie Good (Supervisor), Kenny Lyden, Steve Kemp, Kieron Cheek, Dalia Pokutta, Darryl Freer, Peter James, Michael Fleming, Piotr Brozyna and Mike Trevarthen. The environmental remains were assessed by Chris J. Stevens. The illustrations were prepared by S.E. James and amended for publication by Linda Coleman. Thanks are due to Phil Andrews who commented on an earlier draft. The project was managed on behalf of Wessex Archaeology by Mark Williams, post-excavation analysis was managed by Jörn Schuster.

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