

A NOTE ON THE EXCAVATIONS AT DOD LANE, GLASTONBURY, SOMERSET, 1993

WESSEX ARCHAEOLOGY

SUMMARY

In 1993 Wessex Archaeology undertook a small scale excavation in Glastonbury, outside the Abbey precinct wall and close to the East Gate. Deposits and features associated with medieval pottery (11th to 14th century) were recorded. The activity appears to represent agricultural and/or horticultural activity, or perhaps represent part of a former toft. Unfortunately funding for a programme of post-excavation has not been forthcoming. The report below is therefore drawn from the post-excavation assessment report and as such can only represent a provisional assessment of the site.

INTRODUCTION

In January 1993 Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Somerset County Council to undertake an excavation prior to redevelopment of a site at the junction of Dod Lane and Chilkwell Street in Glastonbury (NGR ST 5035 3880). Chilkwell Street runs parallel to and immediately to the east of the precinct wall of Glastonbury Abbey. Dod Lane lies opposite the East Gate of the precinct. Although the abbey itself has been the subject of intense archaeological scrutiny (see Abrams and Carley 1991 for a recent overview) the remains of the medieval town of Glastonbury have received far less attention.

Medieval pottery had been recovered from the site in the 1980s by Mrs N. Hollinrake. An evaluation of the site in 1992, consisting of a trial trench at either end of the Chilkwell Street frontage, revealed early medieval pottery and deposits (Hollinrake and Hollinrake 1992, Site Code GOT92). The excavation brief supplied by Somerset County Council was designed to connect the two evaluation trenches thus covering the complete street frontage (approximately 20m in total). The width of the trench varied, being constrained by a retaining wall to the west overlooking Chilkwell Street, and foundations for a recent building to the east. Approximately one metre of overburden was removed by machine and approximately one metre of archaeological deposits were then investigated by hand.

The project archive, which includes a copy of the full post-excavation assessment report, has been deposited with Taunton Museum (Accession No. TTNCM 2.1993).

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Two drains, a track, a wall trench, a depression, a gully and three ditches were recorded in total. The earliest features recorded, on stratigraphic grounds, were a depression a north-

south ditch and a north-south gully. The two linear features were superimposed by a series of east-west gullies or ditches in the northern end of the trench. The later features recorded on the site comprised a stone-lined drain, an infilled track and a modern drain, the last two of which are considered to be recent.

Interpretation of the findings is constrained by the limited size of the excavations but overall the features and deposits recorded appear to originate from agricultural and/or horticultural activity, or perhaps represent part of a former toft.

POTTERY BY LORRAINE MEFHAM

A total of 186 sherds of pottery (3224g) was recovered. The majority of the assemblage is medieval in date, but there are also small numbers of post-medieval sherds, and two residual Romano-British coarseware sherds (greywares).

The medieval pottery consists mainly of coarse unglazed wares, almost certainly deriving from cooking pots and bowls. Fabric types include coarse sandy, calcareous and quartz/chert-tempered wares. Rims, one finger-impressed, and sagging bases are present. These vessels can be broadly dated to the 11th–13th century. One vessel has a more rounded base angle and may be of slightly earlier date, perhaps 10th/11th century. Most of these coarsewares are likely to have been fairly locally produced; some fabrics, particularly those containing quartz and chert inclusions, can be broadly paralleled at Ilchester (Pearson 1982); others may have more affinities with material from the north, for example from Cheddar (Rahtz 1979).

Finer sandy glazed wares, some decorated, represent at least one 12th-century tripod pitcher, probably of south-east Wiltshire type, and a small number of slip-decorated jugs of 13th- or early 14th-century date, one of which can be compared to material from the Laverstock kilns outside Salisbury (Musty *et al.* 1969). There are also a small number of sherds of fine sandy glazed wares which can be dated to the late medieval period (14th/15th century).

When examined within the framework of the stratigraphic data, a basic ceramic sequence can tentatively be identified within the medieval assemblage. One of the earliest features on the site, the north-south ditch, contains only coarse unglazed wares, and might be dated on this basis to the 11th/12th century. Glazed wares (dated late 13th/14th century) and other identifiably later medieval wares occur in stratigraphically later contexts, the earliest associated with the parallel east-west ditches. Given the relative absence of medieval sherds from post-medieval contexts, there appears to be little disturbance of medieval layers by post-medieval activity.

Post-medieval pottery (28 sherds in total) comprises coarse redwares, some slip-decorated, probably from several different sources; one sherd of tin-glazed earthenware, and one sherd of modern whiteware.

OTHER FINDS

Metalwork comprises 10 iron objects, all likely to be nails. In addition a copper alloy round-headed pin was recovered from an ash deposit. The pin, which measures *c.* 60mm in length, is likely to be of late medieval or early post-medieval date (15th–17th century). Ceramic building material collected comprises 13 fragments and consists of late medieval or early post-medieval (15th–17th century) tile fragments (some glazed) and modern brick fragments. Other ceramic artefacts comprise one piece of featureless fired clay and seven fragments of clay pipe, all stem apart from one tiny bowl fragment.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATERIAL BY M. J. ALLEN AND SARAH WYLES

A total of 151 pieces (6391g) of animal bone was recovered. As part of the post-excavation assessment the assemblage was rapidly scanned (full data in archive). All identifications are therefore provisional. Although the assemblage was relatively small, preservation was good. The species represented from sealed medieval contexts is interesting. The main species were cattle (27 fragments) and sheep/goat (14 fragments) but the presence of a relatively large proportion of the pelvic region of a young mature horse is noteworthy and presence of possible deer fragments may also be significant. Pig is present in several contexts (5 fragments).

Also as part of the post-excavation assessment, four bulk samples from medieval contexts were processed and the flots scanned. All samples produced grain but no chaff. Few weed seeds were observed; charcoal was common. Up to four separate species of grain were recognised: predominantly wheat (*Triticum*) with barley (*Hordeum*) and possibly rye (cf. *Secale*). The lack of chaff fragments (e.g. rachis fragments etc.) and paucity of other weed seeds suggests the presence of cleaned and processed grain.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Although the excavation was on a small scale, largely the result of physical constraints, the quality of the excavated evidence appears good. The outline stratigraphic sequence is supported by the ceramic assemblage and strengthens the quality of the latter in that suggests that the material is from a selection of relatively uncontaminated features.

The provisional sequence of events would suggest that this area was subjected to low-intensity development during the earlier medieval period, with ditches and gullies providing evidence for land division and drainage. A fresh water drain crosses the site and possibly dates to the later medieval period, serving the Abbey complex to the west. Structural evidence does not occur until the end of the medieval period when a wall trench and some building rubble were deposited at the northern end of the excavated area.

The provisional sequence of events outline above, coupled with the range of supporting material evidence collected during the excavation (including environmental data) means that an opportunity exists to throw some light on general land use in an area *outside* of the abbey itself. The excavation, therefore, has a greater potential than its physical extent would suggest, given the general lack of knowledge about the development of the secular settlement. Further work is required to confirm the assessment observations and would clearly make a good contribution to understanding the development of the town. It is to be hoped that at some stage in the future the County Council will be able to make provision for the necessary post-excavation analysis with a view to publishing a full report.

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