

**The excavation of a medieval farmstead at Nerrols Farm, Cheddon Fitzpaine, Taunton**

*Paul Rainbird with contributions by Dana Challinor, David Dawson, John A Giorgi and Naomi Payne*

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# THE EXCAVATION OF A MEDIEVAL FARMSTEAD AT NERROLS FARM, CHEDDON FITZPAINE, TAUNTON

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with contributions by Dana Challinor, David Dawson, John A. Giorgi and Naomi Payne

## SUMMARY

*An archaeological excavation undertaken by AC Archaeology between March and June 2016 on land at Nerrols Farm, Taunton, exposed a medieval farmstead comprising the locations of two possible structures, one a house and the other a barn, as well as extensive evidence for land division and drainage. A large assemblage of medieval pottery of 11th- to 13th-century date was recovered and this is described in detail. A pit containing evidence for ironworking was dated by radiocarbon method to the late 9th to 10th centuries. Environmental evidence from both phases of medieval use of the site is also described.*

## INTRODUCTION

An archaeological excavation was undertaken by AC Archaeology on land at Nerrols Farm, Taunton (centred on ST 244 266; Fig. 1), between March and June 2016 in advance of residential and mixed-use development. The total development site covered approximately 15ha of agricultural fields surrounding Nerrols Farm, on the north-eastern outskirts of Taunton, within the parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine. Following an archaeological trial trench evaluation the area agreed for excavation was a single field to the south of the current farm and occupying a gentle south facing slope falling from 20m to 17m above Ordnance Datum at its south-western limits. The underlying solid geology comprises Triassic mudstone, siltstone and sandstone, overlain by superficial deposits of sand and gravel (BGS 2019).

The full background to the excavation, discussion of the small amount of Middle Bronze Age and Romano-British features and non-medieval finds from the site and further feature descriptions (Rainbird 2018) are available through the Archaeology Data Service (<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/greyllit/browse.cfm>) and a summary of the medieval archaeology and detailed presentation of the significant findings is provided here. Prehistoric activity evidenced elsewhere at the Nerrols Farm site is discussed in this volume (Davies *et al.*, pp. 14-41).

## RESULTS

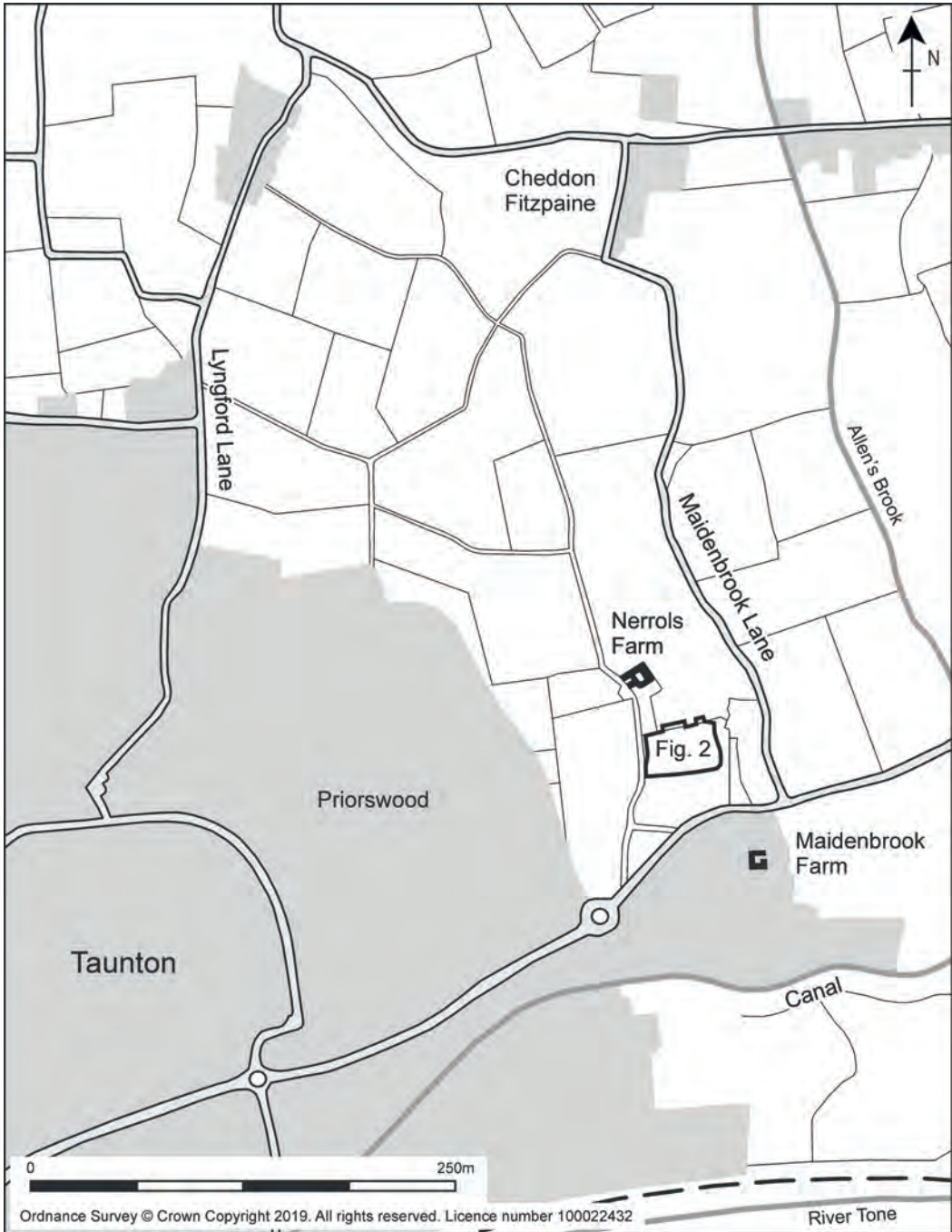
### Introduction

Archaeological features and deposits were present across the whole of the stripped area (Fig. 2). Natural subsoil comprised reddish-brown and yellowish-brown sandy clay, with localised patches of gravel and was overlain by an agricultural subsoil and then topsoil. Two probable structures (S1481 and S587) and a series of boundary ditches and pits were exposed.

### Structure S1481 (Figs 3-4)

A roughly rectangular cluster of pits and postholes (F215, F232, F234, F242, F244, F246, F248, F250, F252, F254, F256, F258, F260, F281, F283, F303, F356, F358, F360, F362, F364 and F410) in the south-west corner of the site probably marks the position of a structure. A completely coherent plan is difficult to discern which perhaps reflects phases of rebuilding and internal divisions. Maximum dimensions for the building are approximately 8m long north to south by 5m wide east to west. A total of 34 sherds of medieval pottery was recovered from eight of the features in this group.

Directly to the east of S1481 was a collection of pits and ditches which contained pottery of the same date as the structure and appears to be associated with it. A shallow ditch, re-cut several times (F399, F401, F446 and F985), along with a series of pits (F423, F433, F969, F971, F981 and F1000) form a group (F1483) which contained a total of 87 sherds of pottery. A pair of rubbish pits (F366 and F421) contained 75 pottery sherds. A further group (F1482) of ditches and pits (F239, F268, F270, F285, F288, F290, F292, F294, F323, F329, F352, F385 and F406) was exposed to the south-east of S1481; these contained a total of 114 sherds. The two groups were connected by approximately north to south aligned ditches F415/F425, F427 and F429, which contained 10 sherds. To the north of S1481 a group (F1473) comprised of inter-cutting shallow ditches (F295, F296, F300, F339, F343, F394 and F472) contained 313 sherds.



*Fig. 1 Site location*

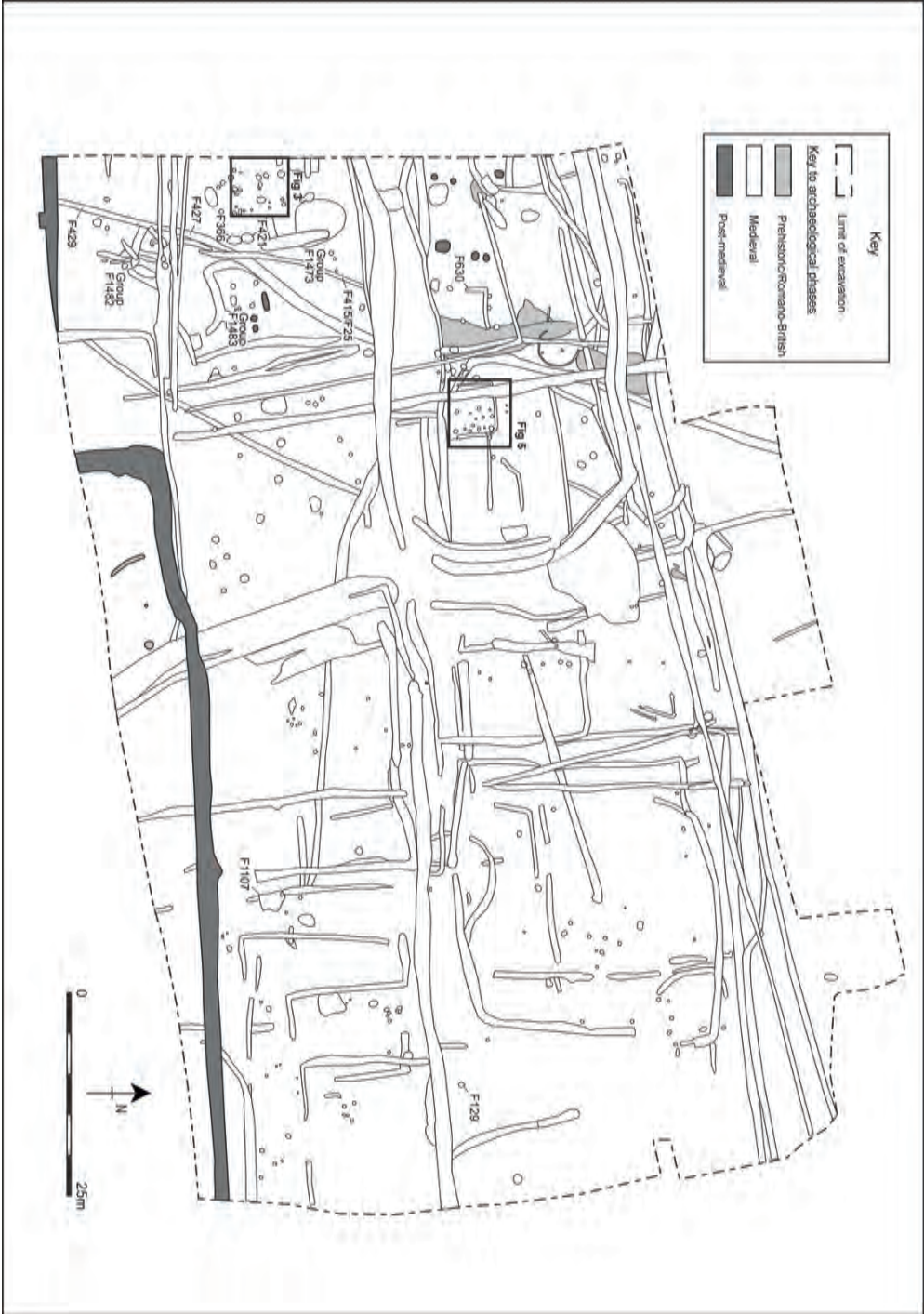


Fig. 2 Site plan

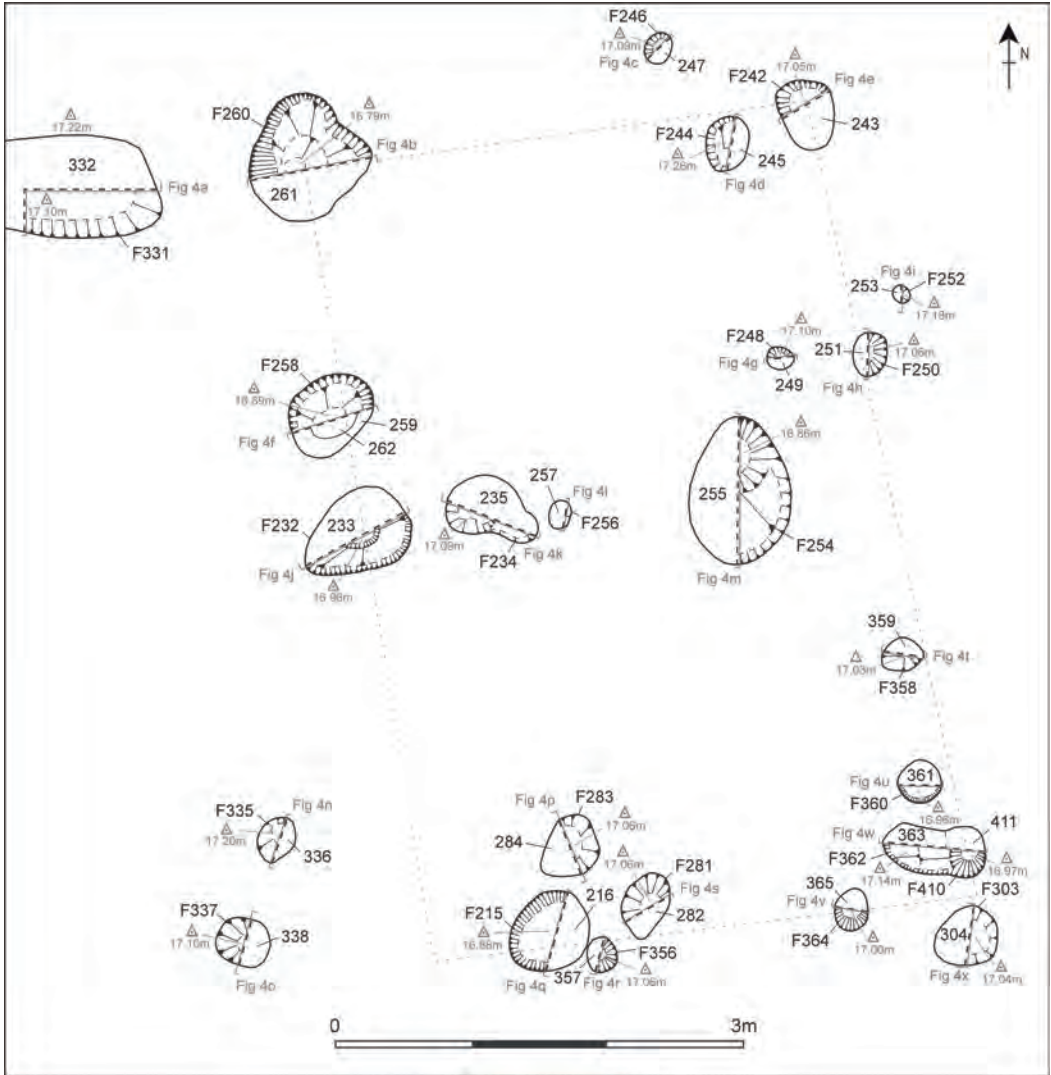


Fig. 3 Plan of probable structure SI481



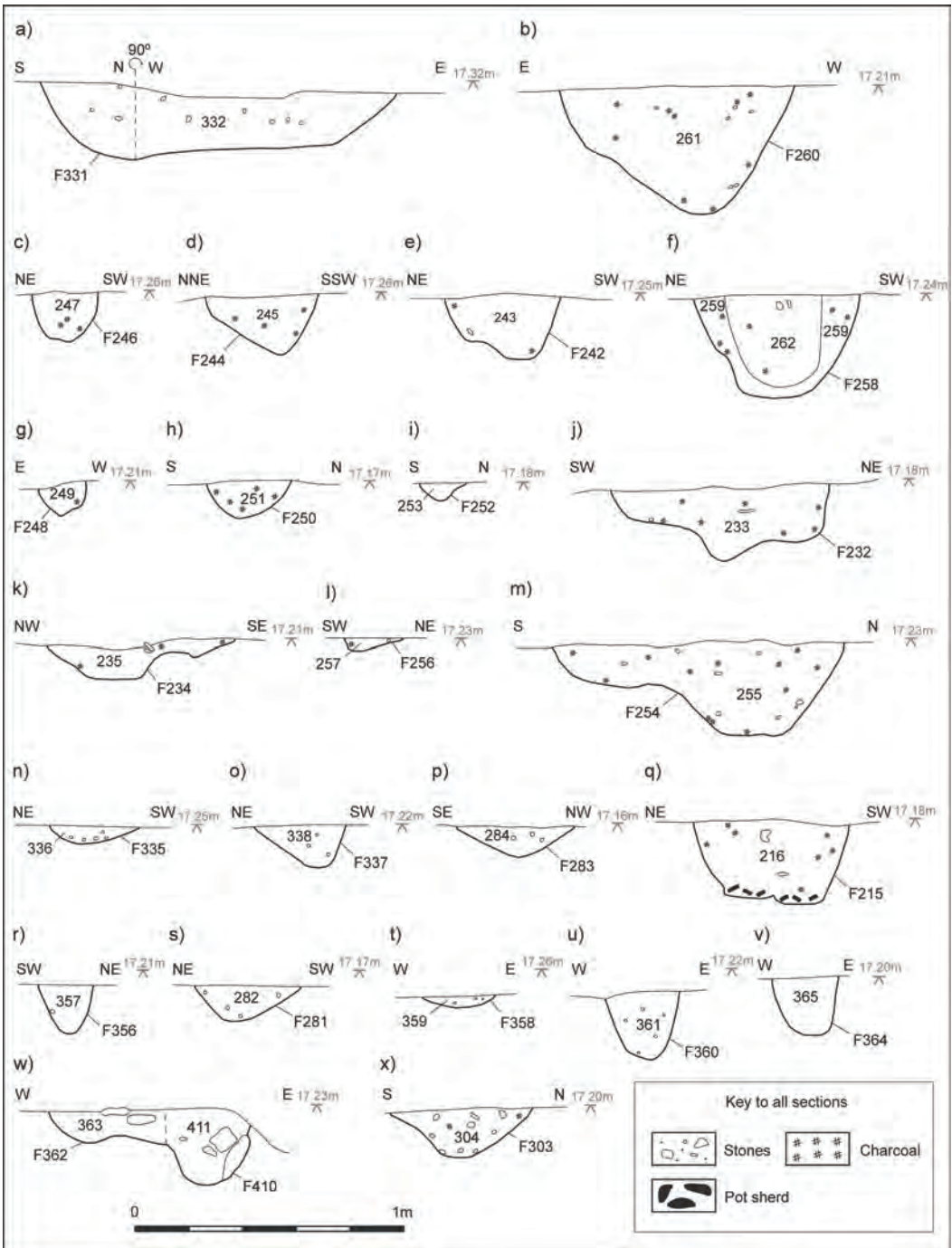


Fig. 4 Sections of probable structure S1481

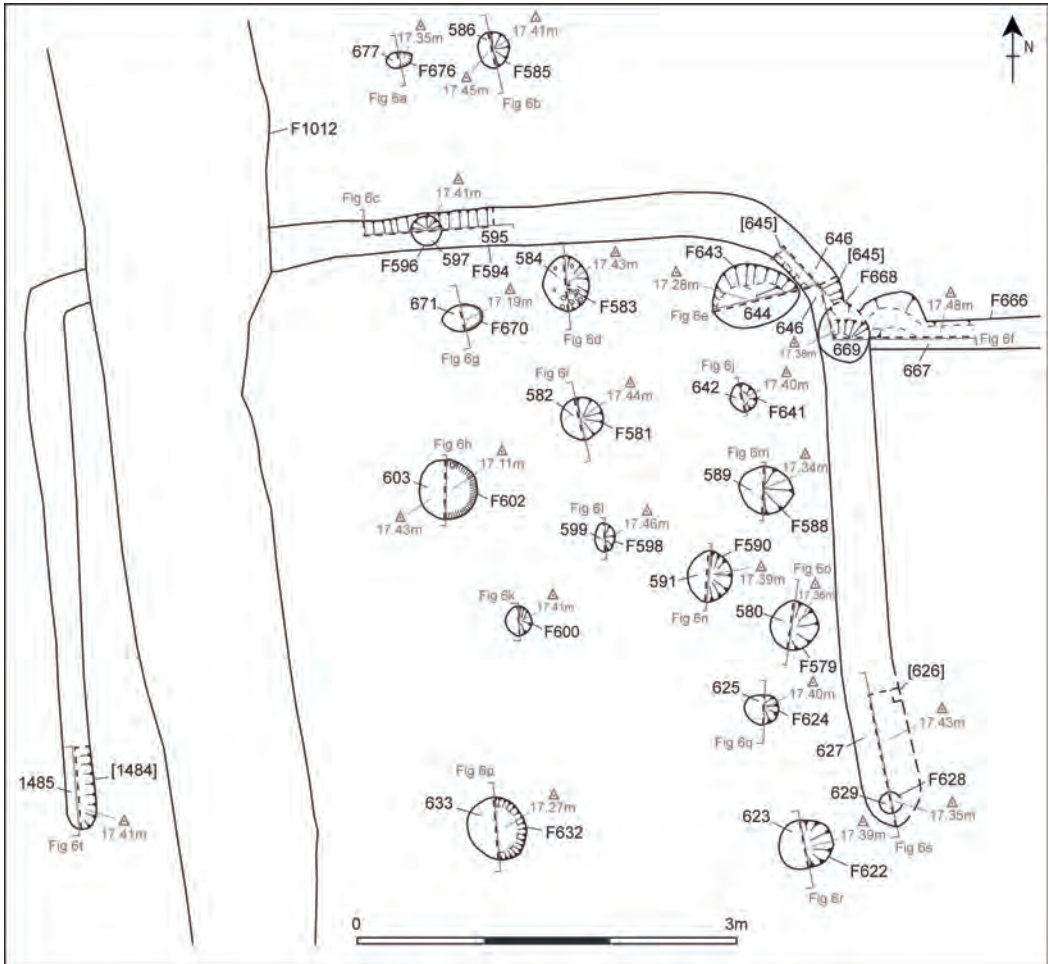


Fig. 5 Plan of structure S587

### Structure S587 (Figs 5-6)

This structure comprised a foundation trench which was U-shaped in plan and which enclosed 16 pits and postholes. The foundation trench was excavated in four segments ([594], [626], [645] and [1484]) and measured up to 0.28m wide by 0.10m deep, with steep straight sides and a flat base. Although this may have held a cill beam, three postholes (F596, F628 and F668) were present in its base and it is more probably a post trench where the structural posts were placed before the trench was backfilled. The trench measured 7m east-west and each side aligned north-south terminated after a length of 4.5m. The features (F579, F581, F583, F585, F588, F590, F598, F600, F602, F624, F632, F641, F643 and F670) within were clustered in the east side although the west side was largely lost to a later

north-south aligned medieval ditch (F1012). The postholes had diameters of between 0.25-0.35m and were generally shallow, although a few were much deeper (up to 0.41m). Interpretation of the structure is difficult; the cluster of postholes could define a rectangular building measuring 5m by 3m, but this would not account for the post trench. Perhaps the southern terminals marked the position of a cross-passage with the remainder of the building lost to the south; this is unlikely as the building's width would have been 7m, which is wider than the 5-6m typical of a medieval building. The small number of finds associated with the structure may indicate an agricultural function; only three sherds of pottery were recovered from the post trench, although shallow bowl-shaped pit F581 contained 52 sherds. If the post trench is considered complete, then a structure open-fronted to the south is perhaps the best

interpretation. This could be an early example of a linhay, a type of open-fronted cattle shed typical of south-west England, with many examples known from west Somerset (Acland 1850 in Alcock 1963, 125). They are rectangular in plan with a solid long rear and short side walls, and piers along the open front supporting the roof. The lack of evidence for piers may be explained by known examples which were constructed of cob (Brunskill 2007, 71). Apart from the open front the other defining feature of a linhay is an open-fronted hay loft for the storage of feed and in this case perhaps the cluster of postholes at the east end of the building marks the position of a loft which did not

extend along the whole length of the building. Interpreting a hay loft at a time when hay ricks would be regarded as the norm may be a step too far and this interpretation should be regarded as highly tentative, although the pier bases for a possible medieval linhay were exposed during a watching brief at Cleeve Abbey (Watts and Hall 2006, 137).

To the west of structure S587 was gully F630 which shared its east-west alignment. Gully F630 was L-shaped and measured 6m east-west, with a north-south arm measuring 2.5m long forming a corner at the west end. It was an irregular feature measuring 0.42m wide by 0.08m deep, with concave sides and an undulating

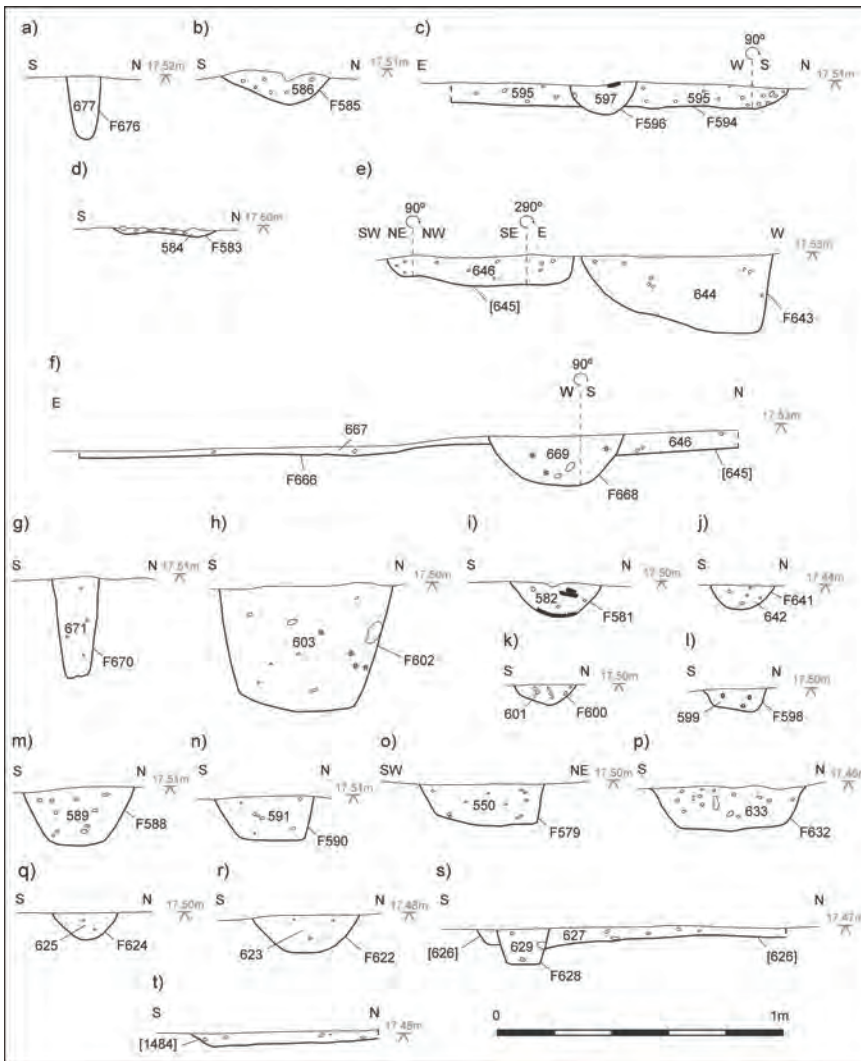


Fig. 6 Sections of structure S587



concave base. No finds were recovered and, although the alignment indicates that it is probably contemporary with S587, an interpretation of a function for this gully is not forthcoming.

### Boundary ditches and pits (Fig. 2)

The linear features that were ubiquitous across the stripped area are for the most part medieval in date and indicate intensive agricultural activity encompassing the period of the farmstead. These ditches were often shallow and were typically up to 1m wide, but although on occasions were over 2m wide and 1m deep. They demonstrate a complicated history of digging and renewal, with the understanding of relationships significantly hampered by fills that were largely indistinct from the natural subsoil. The largely chronologically indistinct nature of the pottery assemblage, along with the very complicated character of the recutting and intercutting of the ditches, prevents ceramic or other detailed phasing of the site, meaning that a medieval date bounded by that for the pottery of 11th to 13th centuries provides a broad date for the digging and use of these ditches. A total of 1,388 sherds of medieval pottery was recovered from the linear features, which accounted for nearly half of the ceramic assemblage from the site.

The spread of pits across the site suffers similar problems of chronological definition, and probably date largely to the same period, with 474 sherds of medieval pottery recovered from this feature type. However, in the east of the site was pit F129 which was sub-circular in plan and measured 0.63m long by 0.55m wide with slightly concave steep sides and a flat base. The fill (130) contained iron working slag and also produced hearth or oven lining, but no pottery or other finds. Some poorly-preserved charred grains including several wheat grains, one tentatively identified as free-threshing wheat, were recovered (see Giorgi, below). Two charred grains provided a radiocarbon date of 1111 ± BP (890 to 985 cal AD), placing its filling to the Late Saxon period. This provides an indication that some of the other features may be of the same date and expands the potential timeframe for the creation of the complex web of ditches. A large pit, F1107, in the south-east of the site was irregular in plan and measured 3m long, 2.36m wide and 0.22m deep. It had a thin primary basal fill (1108) which contained 22 sherds of medieval pottery and a main fill (1109) which contained a dump of burnt material comprising charcoal of alder and blackthorn/cherry, and charred plant remains consisting of cereal grains with only traces of cereal chaff, a small number of legumes (including cultivated pulses) and wild plant/weed seeds.

## MEDIEVAL POTTERY

*David Dawson and Naomi Payne*

### Introduction

3,110 medieval sherds weighing just over 24kg in total were recovered during the excavation. The average sherd weight is 7.8g. Although most of these sherds were stratified finds, the intensive recutting of ditches combined with the lack of intercutting features means that the medieval pottery cannot be easily placed into a detailed chronological framework.

### Methodology

The guidelines laid out in *A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology* (2016) were adhered to whilst carrying out the quantification and analysis of the medieval pottery assemblage.

After initial cleaning and quantification, the sherds were examined macroscopically and with a hand lens (x10). On this basis they were, where possible, assigned to one of 19 fabric types. The smallest and most abraded sherds were recorded as unclassified. Each fabric was given a code prefixed with TNF for Taunton, Nerrols Farm, and detailed fabric recording cards were completed for each. The quantity and overall weight of sherds in each fabric were recorded by context on a spreadsheet, along with notes on vessel forms, rim forms and decoration. Copies of the spreadsheet and fabric recording cards will be deposited in the project archive.

### Description of the assemblage

Most sherds in the assemblage are likely to derive from jars. There are a few fragments from pitchers, jugs and an open form which is a variant of the West Country Dish. Table 1 summarises this information, with total sherd counts and weights for each of the fabrics, along with a calculation of overall percentage (by weight). Table 2 quantifies the assemblage by context type. The majority of the medieval pottery (by weight) came from ditches (45.3%) and pits (16.9%) with smaller quantities from postholes (6.5%) and gullies (3.9%).

### The pottery fabric type series

Nineteen fabrics were identified and these are described below. At least four of these are likely to be variants of the Upper Greensand Derived (UGSD) pottery which contains minerals identified to the Blackdown Hills, and which was manufactured between c. 950-1350 (Allan *et al.* 2011); the most abundant fabric, TNF002, is likely to be UGSD. The only other type of pottery that can be

TABLE 1 QUANTIFICATION OF EACH FABRIC TYPE (COUNT, WEIGHT, % OF TOTAL BY WEIGHT)

Fabric type	Sherd count	Sherd weight	% by weight
TNF001	97	652	2.7
TNF002	769	10171	42.1
TNF003	230	2545	10.5
TNF004	120	1241	5.1
TNF005	9	60	0.2
TNF006	299	3418	14.1
TNF007	30	214	0.9
TNF008	15	167	0.7
TNF009	23	156	0.6
TNF010	70	940	3.9
TNF011	37	620	2.6
TNF012	3	18	0.1
TNF013	5	22	0.1
TNF014	3	3	0.0
TNF015	4	18	0.1
TNF016	31	725	3.0
TNF017	2	8	0.0
TNF018	1	39	0.2
TNF019	2	98	0.4
Unclassified	1360	3058	12.7
Total	3110	24173	100.0

TABLE 2 SUMMARY TABLE OF MEDIEVAL POTTERY BY CONTEXT TYPE

Context type	Sherd count	Sherd weight (g)	% by weight
Ditch	1078	9428	39.0
Ditch terminal	157	1534	6.3
Gully	150	929	3.8
Gully terminal	3	16	0.1
Land drain	13	72	0.3
Pit	474	4095	17.0
Posthole	232	1581	6.5
Ring gully	1	11	0.0
Overlying deposits	167	945	3.9
Surface finds	835	5562	23.0
Total	3110	24173	100.0

ascribed a date range on the basis of fabric is TNF017, Ham Green B ware (Bristol pottery type 27), which is dated by dendrochronological association at Dundas Wharf, Bristol, c. 1175-1250 (Ponsford 1991, 84, 95-8). Detailed comparisons of all the TNF types were sought with the Bristol Pottery Type Series, the Taunton Fore Street type series (a simplification of the original Taunton type series) and the Taunton Castle fabric type series as well as those sherds sampled by Hughes in the Somerset reference collection of sampled sherds (Pearson 1984; Burrow 1988; Ponsford 1998; Dawson with Dawson 2016). It is striking how few similarities were found in the fabrics.

TNF001: some variation in colour but often with grey core and margins with buff/grey mottled with buff surfaces; medium hard with slightly rough surfaces and irregular laminar fracture; inclusions of frequent small irregular voids <4mm where soft limestone has leached, sparse rounded fossil limestone <2mm, moderate sub-rounded limestone <0.5mm, moderate sub-rounded multi-coloured quartz <2mm and moderate angular white quartz <3mm. Form: hand-built jar. Decoration: fingernail impressions around the rim.

TNF002: some variation in colour but often with grey core and margins, reddish buff exterior and red to black interior; medium to hard, rough interior and smoother exterior and irregular slightly laminar fracture; inclusions of occasional sub-rounded chert <2mm, frequent multi-coloured rounded quartz <2mm and sparse sub-rounded limestone <3mm. Form: hand-built jar, handled pitcher, West Country Dish variant. Decoration: fingernail impressions around the top of the rim, fingertip impressions around the top of the rim, two parallel grooved lines around the top of the rim, linear combing on the body and applied vertical ribs on the body; two lines of paired fingertip impressions or applied vertical strips on pitcher handles. An Upper Greensand Derived (UGSD) fabric. Similar to Taunton Castle type 023; Pearson type 222 (Pearson 1984, 12; Dawson with Dawson 2016, 111; Andersen *et al.* 2016, 302-3).

TNF003: some variation in colour but often with dark grey core and margins, grey to dark grey exterior and grey to buff interior; medium to hard, fine sandy feel with rougher interior and irregular fracture; inclusions of sparse irregular calcite <5mm, moderate irregular white quartz <4mm, moderate irregular multi-coloured quartz <1mm and occasional sub-angular chert <2mm. Form: hand-built jar, handled pitcher, West Country Dish variant. Decoration: fingertip impressions around the top of the rim, rouletting on the body and incised wavy lines on the body. Probably a variant of UGSD.

TNF004: grey to buff core and margins, warm buff to black exterior and grey interior; hard with smooth exterior, rough interior and irregular laminar fracture; inclusions of occasional sub-angular chert <6mm, frequent angular to sub-rounded multi-coloured quartz <1mm and common fine mica. Form: hand-built jar, handled pitcher, West Country Dish variant. Decoration: fingertip impressions around the top of the rim and combed wavy lines on the body. Probably a variant of UGSD.

TNF005: black core and margins, grey to black exterior and grey mottled buff to black interior; medium hard, sandy/silty feel with regular slightly laminar fracture; inclusions of sparse sub-angular limestone <2mm, frequent sub-angular to sub-rounded multi-coloured quartz <1mm (but mostly finer) and common fine mica. Form: hand-built jar.

TNF006: dark buff to black core, dark grey exterior and buff interior; medium hard with fine, sandy feel and regular fracture; inclusions of sparse voids (possibly from organic material) <4mm, common sub-angular to rounded multi-coloured quartz <2mm and common fine mica. Form: hand-built jar, West Country Dish variant. Decoration: fingertip impressions around the rim.

TNF007: dark grey core, reddish-buff margins, reddish brown exterior and reddish buff interior; very hard with very fine sandy feel and regular fracture; inclusions of common fine sub-rounded multi-coloured quartz <1mm, common fine mica and sparse sub-rounded ferruginous lumps <1mm. Form: hand-built jar and handled pitcher. Similar to Taunton Castle fabric type 024 (Dawson with Dawson 2016, 111-2).

TNF008: grey core and interior margins, buff exterior margins, buff exterior and dark grey interior; medium hard with granular, sandy feel and regular (although highly eroded) fracture; inclusions of abundant sub-rounded to rounded multi-coloured quartz <1mm and sparse sub-rounded to sub-angular pinkish white quartz <2mm. Form: hand-built jar. Decoration: fingertip impression on the outside of the rim.

TNF009: light grey to grey core, orange to grey exterior margins, orange-grey with some orange mottling exterior and grey mottled with orange interior; medium to hard with very fine sandy, slightly rough feel and regular fracture; inclusions of moderate sub-rounded black pellets <0.5mm, frequent rounded transparent quartz <0.5mm, moderate sub-angular red to black ferruginous lumps <1mm, sparse angular calcite <4mm and sparse sub-angular opaque white quartz <2mm. Form: wheel-thrown jug with rod handle. Decoration: external

reduced plain lead glaze (yellow with green-brown mottling) or reduced green glaze with green speckles, horizontal corrugations, iron-rich vertical strip, lightly incised zigzagged lines, bands of incised wavy lines with horizontal slipped iron-rich band in between. Iron-rich strip decoration suggests a date between c. 1250-1350.

TNF010: orange core, margins and surfaces; soft with a smooth (albeit highly abraded) feel and regular (but abraded) fracture; inclusions of moderate sub-rounded to rounded ferruginous particles <2mm, moderate sub-angular to sub-rounded multi-coloured quartz <1mm and sparse sub-angular sparkly brown stones <1mm. Form: jug (uncertain method of forming). Decoration: external reduced brown plain lead glaze, speckled light green glaze with iron-rich applied strip, stamped dots and circles. The iron-rich strip decoration suggests a date between c. 1250-1350.

TNF011: buff core and exterior margins, grey interior margins, exterior surface varies from buff to grey to orange to brown, dark buff interior surface; medium to hard with rough, gritty feel and regular fracture; inclusions of sparse angular ?calcite <3mm, frequent rounded multi-coloured quartz <5mm, moderate angular chert <5mm, sparse rounded shell <3mm moderate sub-angular voids <5mm and sparse sub-rounded ferruginous (or red stone) lumps <3mm. Form: hand-built jar. Probably a variant of UGSD.

TNF012: grey core, margins and interior surface, buff to grey exterior surface; medium hard with silty feel and fairly regular fracture; inclusions of moderate iron-stained angular ?calcite <4mm, rare sub-rounded red stones <3mm, moderate sub-rounded ferruginous particles <2mm, moderate fine mica, rare sub-rounded white quartz <1mm and rare sub-angular to sub-rounded unidentified grey inclusions <2mm. Form hand-built jar. Decoration: applied ?horizontal strip.

TNF013: dark grey core, dark brown exterior margin, dark grey interior margin, brown exterior surface and dark grey interior surface; moderately hard with rough feel and irregular fracture; inclusions of, common angular white ?calcite <3mm, sparse angular black ?calcite <3mm, sparse sub-rounded to rounded red ferruginous lumps <1mm, sparse angular dark-coloured quartz <1mm, sparse angular limestone <1mm and sparse fine mica. Form: hand-built jar. The external surface inclusions look as though they have been acquired when wet (i.e. the pots may have been deliberately rolled in crushed white ?calcite).

TNF014: grey core, orange exterior margin, grey to orange interior margin, orange external surface and orange to grey interior surface; moderately hard with

sandy feel and smooth fracture; inclusions of abundant angular to sub-angular fine sand, sparse sub-rounded ferruginous particles <0.5mm and sparse angular to sub-rounded voids <4mm. Form: wheel-thrown jug. Decoration: oxidised brown lead glaze with a patch of reduced green and possible frilly base.

TNF015: light grey core, exterior margins and exterior surface, orange interior margins and surface; moderately hard with fine sandy feel and slightly laminar fracture; inclusions of abundant fine white mica, sparse sub-rounded ferruginous particles <1mm, moderate sub-rounded to sub-angular fine black iron particles, abundant sub-angular fine quartz sand, rare sub-angular voids <3mm and rare sub-rounded limestone <1mm. Form: white-thrown jug. Decoration: reduced lime green lead glaze with black flecks.

TNF016: dark grey core and exterior margins, dark grey to reddish-buff interior margins and surface, grey exterior surface; hard with sandy feel and irregular fracture; inclusions of moderate sub-angular limestone <10mm, sparse sub-angular white and grey quartz <2mm, sparse rounded ferruginous particles <3mm, sparse sub-rounded voids (possibly from organic temper) and sparse fine mica. Form: hand-built jar.

TNF017: grey core and margins and light grey/buff surfaces; hard with sandy feel and smooth fracture; inclusions of sparse angular voids (from organic temper?) <3mm, sparse angular black iron particles <2mm, sparse rounded multi-coloured quartz <2mm and sparse angular flint <3mm. Form: hand-made jug. Decoration: reduced green glaze and an applied band (?horizontal) with possible rouletting. Similar to Ham Green B ware (Barton 1963; Ponsford 1991).

TNF018: mid to dark grey throughout; medium hard with a soapy, smooth feel and irregular fracture; inclusions of frequent sub-rounded voids (from leached out limestone?) <5mm, sparse angular limestone <1mm and moderate fine mica. Form: hand-built jar/uncertain.

TNF019: grey core, light grey margins, grey exterior surface and buff internal surface; hard with slightly sandy feel and smooth fracture; inclusions of sparse rounded quartz <0.5mm and angular black inclusions <2mm. Form: hand-made jug. Decoration: external reduced green glaze, applied wavy (thumbed) band around the rim and applied face mask positioned just below the rim. The face is bearded with a thumb impression on the forehead. The beard is formed from short incised lines. This is possibly a Ham Green 'transitional' product but no close parallel for the face mask has been located.

## Forms

### Jars

The vast majority of the sherds are likely to come from open jars, although this cannot be determined with certainty for many sherds. A particular style of everted dished rim is seen repeatedly (with minor variation) throughout the assemblage. Numerous examples of similar rim forms are found in Pearson's corpus of pottery from Taunton especially those illustrated 17 to 147 (Pearson microfiche series I, 1984; PT denotes Pearson's fabric type number). There are several other rim forms which appear less frequently. Particular matches with examples in Pearson's corpus may be noted. Rims indented with finger impressions such as nos 1 and 8 below can be seen in vessels from Taunton for example Pearson's no. 115 (E10/11 in PT 235 described A11) and dished everted rims often with an internal bevel are common, for example Pearson's no. 170 (F1/F4 in PT 225 described on A12, also illustrated in Dawson with Dawson 2016, 124, 126). Others are indicated in jars of fabric TNF003 to provide a flavour of how similar the

repertoire of forms was in sites in central Taunton. Some Nerrols Farm sherds were carinated, showing that they were from vessels with saggy bases. A few vessels are decorated. All are hand built.

### *Jars of fabric type 003 (Fig. 7, 1-7)*

All are similar to Pearson's early 12th-century types. Note decoration with rouletting and incised wavy line.

1: Everted rim decorated with finger impressions (see Pearson E10/E11 no. 115 PT 235, A11; Dawson with Dawson 2016, 124, 126). D (Diameter) approx. 320mm, context 459.

2: Dished everted rim. D approx. 180mm, context 1108.

3: Dished everted rim (see Pearson F1/F4 no. 170 PT 225, A12; Dawson with Dawson 2016, 124). D approx. 240mm, context 1412.

4: Dished everted rim (see Pearson E10/E11 no. 126 PT 236, A11-2; Dawson with Dawson 2016, 124, 126). D approx. 155mm, context 1419.

5 and 6: Three body sherds are decorated with roulettes carved with lozenges. This technique is similar to a number of vessels excavated by St George Gray (1941)

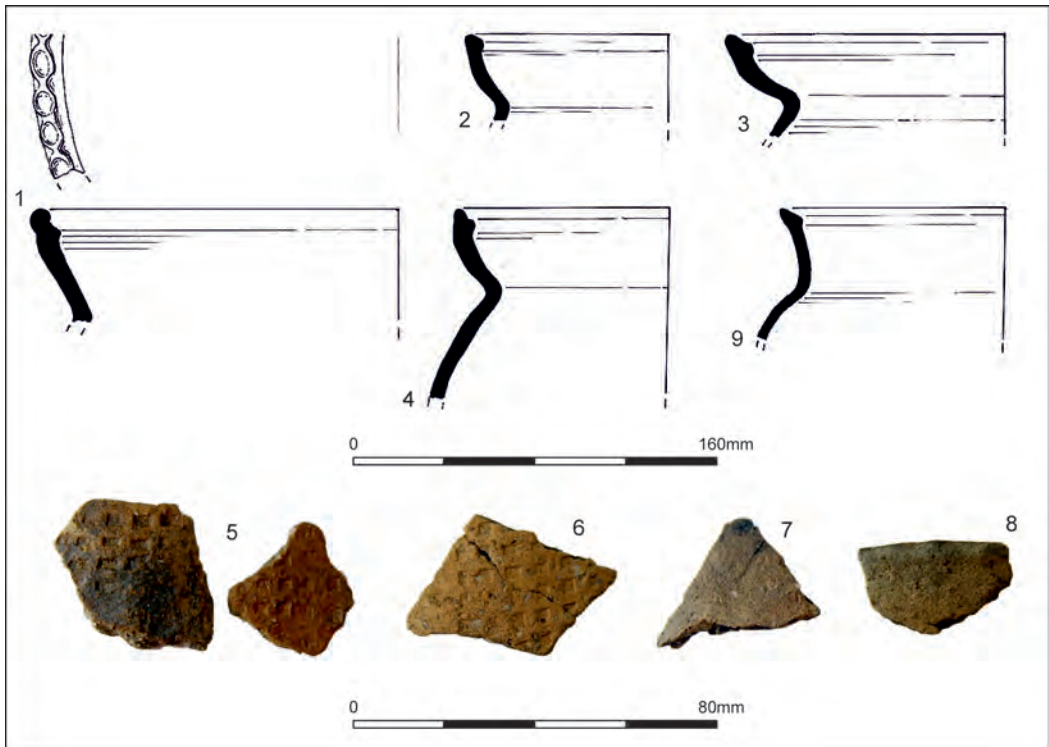


Fig. 7 12th-century type jars. 1-7 jars of fabric TNF003; 8-9 jars of fabric TNF004



from Taunton Castle (Pearson D14/E1, nos 2, 6, 12, 15 and 16: Dawson with Dawson 2016, 117-9, 122). These however are made in different fabric, Pearson's 222 which is analogous to TNF 002 (Pearson 1984, A8). Pearson dates these to the second quarter of the 12th century and a specific documented phase in the construction of the castle. However their association with the structure is not secure, neither is the association between the documented construction dates and the structure concerned.

5 and 6 have a reduced grey core and partially reoxidised buff exterior. Contexts 459 and 1409 respectively.

7: Body sherds with incised wavy line. Context 473.

*Jars of fabric type 004 (Fig. 7, 8-9)*

All are similar to Pearson's early 12th-century types.

8: A thumb decorated rim similar to 1. Context 400.

9: Everted rim. D approx. 194mm, context 800.

*Jars of fabric type 001 (Fig. 8, 10-12)*

All are similar to Pearson's 12th-century types.

10: Dished everted rim. D approx. 220mm, context 308.

11: Everted rim. D approx. 396mm, context 459.

12: Dished everted rim. D. approx. 220mm, context 1242.

*Jars of fabric type 002 (Fig. 8, 13-21; Fig. 9, 22-30; Fig. 10, 31-33)*

All are similar to Pearson's 12/13th-century types.

13: Plain everted rim. The simplicity of this vessel form may indicate a date earlier than the 12th century. D approx. 230mm, context 1262.

14: Everted rim. D approx. 180mm, context 160.

15: Slightly dished everted rim. D approx. 158mm, context 208.

16: Everted rim, sharply defined shoulder. D approx. 154mm, context 228.

17: Dished everted rim. D approx. 194mm, context 272.

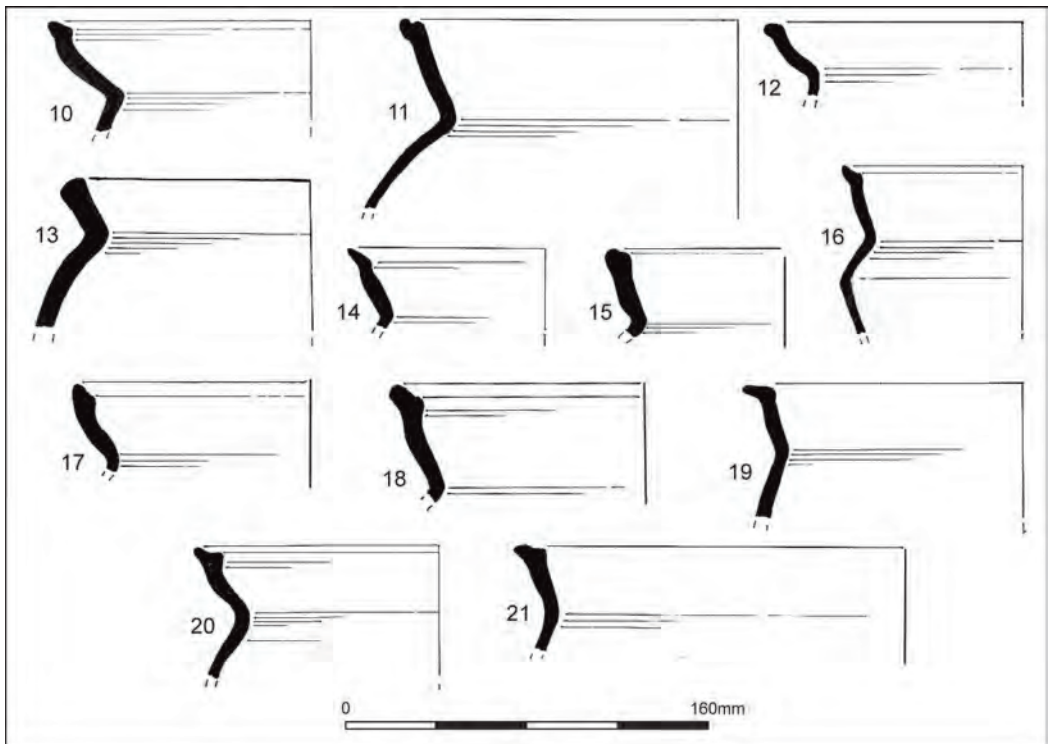
18: Dished everted rim. D approx. 220mm, context 289.

19: Everted flattened out turned rim, similar to 26. D approx. 250mm, context 297.

20: Dished everted rim. D approx. 220mm, context 307.

21: Dished everted rim. D approx. 340mm, context 307.

22: Everted rim. D approx. 212mm, context 308.



*Fig. 8 12th/13th-century type jars, 10-12 of fabric TNF001, 13-21 of fabric TNF002*

- 23: Dished everted rim. D approx. 220mm, context 308.  
 24: Dished everted rim. D approx. 220mm, context 342.  
 25: Everted flattened out turned rim, similar to 20. D approx. 250mm, context 413.  
 26: Dished everted rim. D approx. 220mm, context 543.  
 27: Dished everted rim. D approx. 240mm, context 1296.  
 28: Everted rim with marked internal bevel. rim. D approx. 320mm, context 1424.  
 29: Dished everted rim. D approx. 180mm, context 1435.  
 30: Dished rim. D approx. 280mm, context 1447.  
 31: Rim dimpled similar to no. 1. Context 287.  
 32: Body sherd decorated with alternating diagonal combed strokes. Context 1062.  
 33: Body sherd decorated with diagonal combed stroke similar to no. 32. Context 1137.

*Jars of fabric type 006 (Fig. 10, 34-38)*

- 34: Everted hammerhead rim. D approx. 238mm, context 340.  
 35: Everted rim. D approx. 220mm, context 466.  
 36: Slightly dished everted rim. D approx. 180mm,

- context 534.  
 37: Dished everted rim. D approx. 280mm, context 543.  
 38: Body sherd with dimpled applied band. Context 534.

*Jars of fabric type 008 (Fig. 10, 39)*

- 39: Rim dimpled similar to no. 1. Context 1411.

*Jars of fabric type 011 (Fig. 10, 40-41)*

- 40: Dished everted rim. D approx. 240mm, context 805.  
 41: Everted rim. D approx. 276mm, context 1242.

*West Country Dishes (Fig. 11, 42-45)*

Twenty-one sherds (1,191g) derive from four or five vessels of a hand-built open form which may be described as the West Country Dish. The term 'West Country Dish' was adopted by the Medieval Pottery Research Group and was derived from a paper in which E. M. Jope noted the special character of these large shallow dishes with a flat base and one or more perforations in the side and that finds

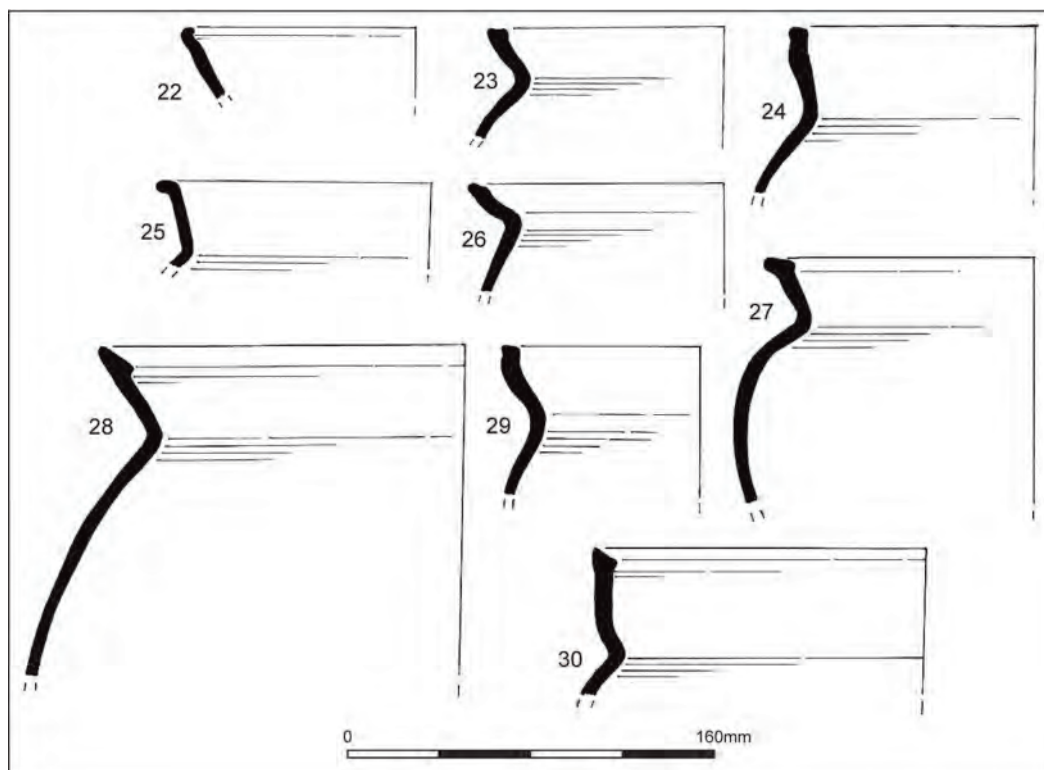


Fig. 9 12th/13th-century type jars of fabric TNF002 22-30

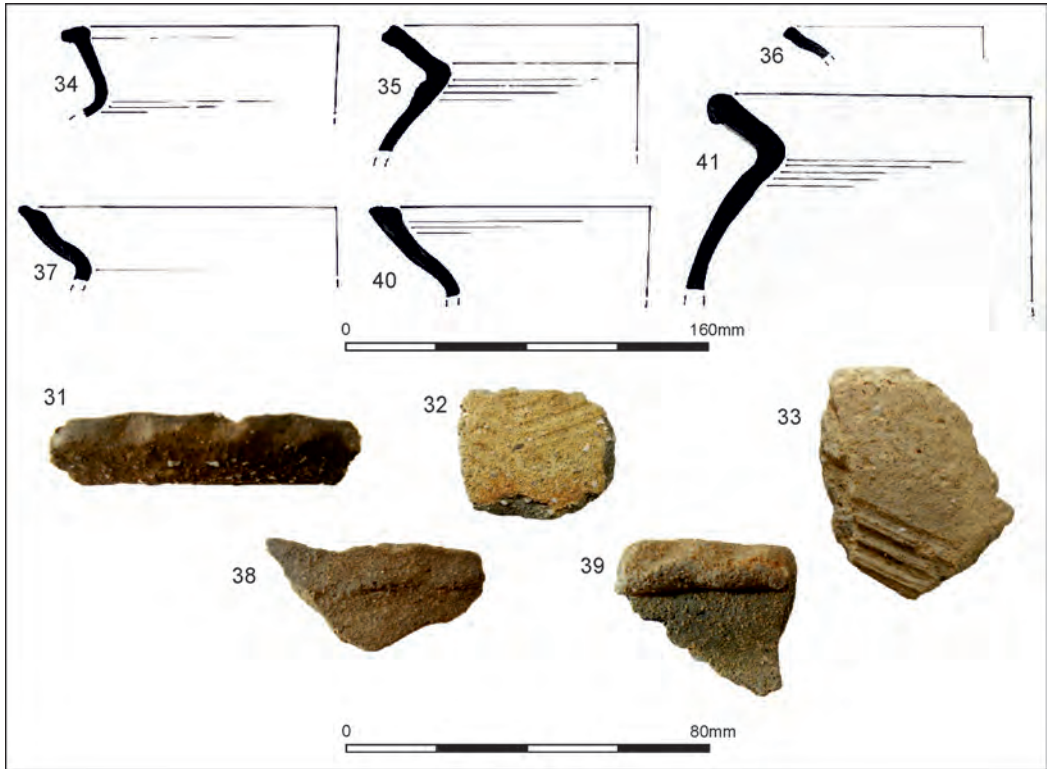


Fig. 10 12th/13th-century type jars, 31-33 of fabric TNF002, 34-38 of fabric TNF006, 39 of fabric TNF008, 40-41 of fabric TNF011

were limited to the West Country (Jope 1952, 64-68, fig.7, 18 and 19; Brown *et al.* 1998, 5.3.1). Jope dated the form to c. 1050-c. 1150 and described a distribution around Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, Bristol and north Somerset, extending into Glamorganshire. The date range was extended into the 13th century by similar forms associated with buildings and four of the pottery kilns at Laverstock, Wiltshire (Musty *et al.* 1969, 107). The examples from Nerrols Farm are also large, shallow vessels with flat bases and with one or more holes half way up the sides. However, the sides are not in-turned with the distinctive acute basal angle, but rather they have out-turned, sloping sides, which may be slightly more everted at the top, and a flat rim. The nearest analogy seems to be a vessel with straight sides only slightly inturned from excavations at Moreton Mill, Somerset (M 121), a site now inundated by Chew Valley Lake (Rahtz and Greenfield 1977, 308-9, fig. 166, 9). The possible function of this singular form of pot – from bee-skep bases to cream separators – has been long debated and, in the context of further plain inturned examples from South Wales, is summarised by Sell (1984). Samples were submitted to the Biochemistry Research

Centre at the University of Bristol to try to detect organic matter that might shed light on the function of the Nerrols Farm dishes, but the results proved negative (Julie Dunne, pers. comm.).

The most complete example (TNF002) was recovered from context 299, fill of ditch F296. There are nine joining sherds (850g) from a large, shallow handmade dish with flared sides, a flat angled rim and a flat base. The external rim diameter is c. 450mm and the overall height is between 75-80mm. There is a single hole made prior to firing positioned half way up the vessel. This has a diameter of 12mm and has been pushed through from the outside. Two of these open vessels are sooted externally (those from context 340, fill of ditch F339, and context 540, fill of pit F539).

42: Everted rim, D 340mm. Reduced grey core, buff to orange exterior, orange interior, sooting on sides, fabric TNF002, context 340.

43: Plain everted rim, D 280mm. Reduced grey core, brown external surface, light buff internal, Fabric TNF003, context 1406.

44: Nearly two-thirds complete with flat everted rim, D

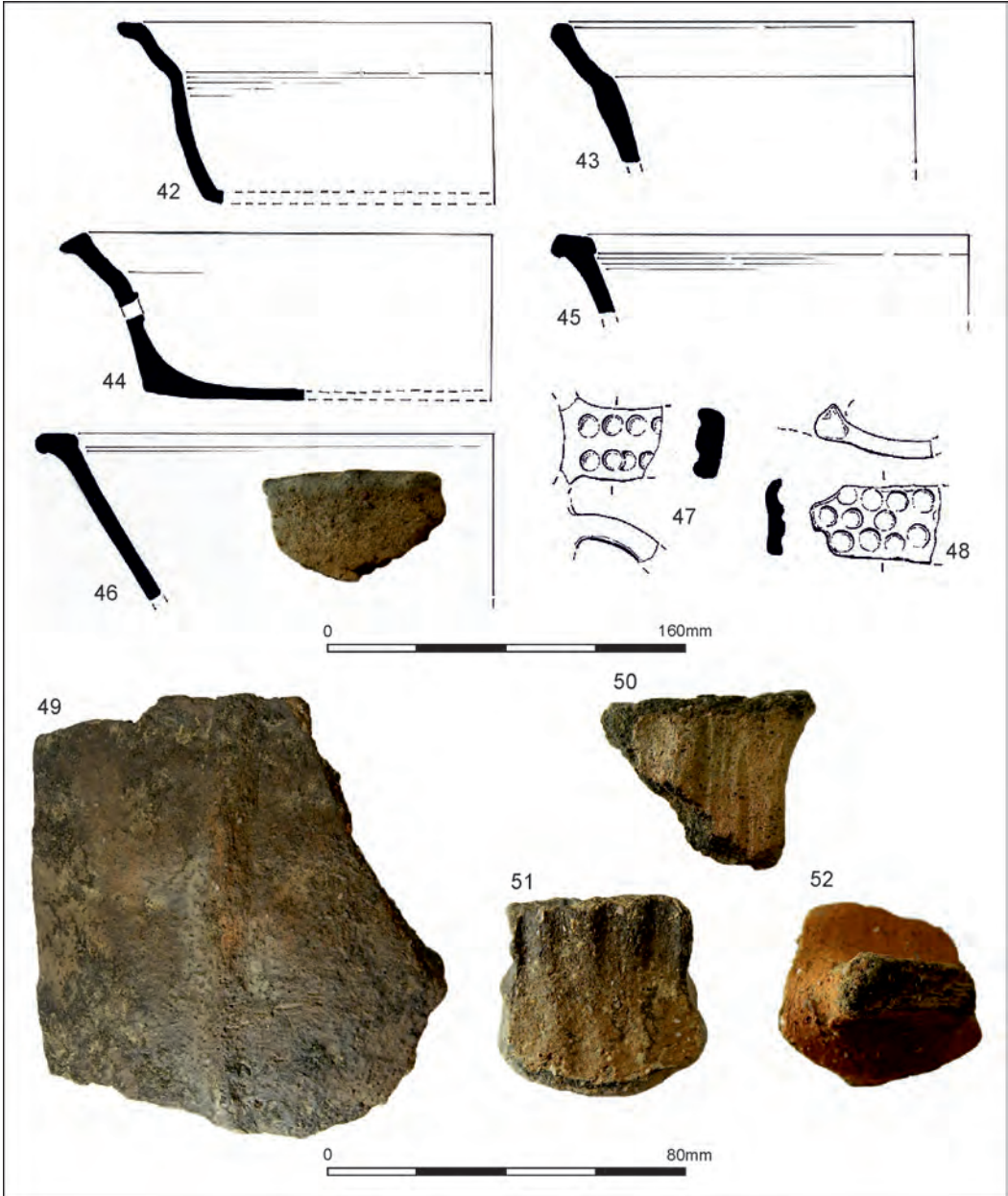


Fig. 11 West Country Dishes, 42 and 44 in fabric TNF002, 43 in TNF004 and 45 in TNF006; bowl 46 in fabric TNF006; pitchers 47-51 in fabric TNF002, 52 in TNF003

390mm. Reduced grey core and dark brown surfaces, fabric TNF002: context 299.

45: Hammerhead everted rim D 280mm. Reoxidised brown darker on exterior, fabric TNF006, context 540.

Possible bowl (Fig. 11, 46)

In addition, a large sherd (171g) from an open form in fabric TNF006 was recovered from context 1412. The

curvature of the rim indicates a very large vessel with a diameter of c. 55cm. This had sloping walls and a flat out-turned rim with a small internal overhang. The vessel had a depth of more than 85mm, but unfortunately the full profile has not been preserved. It is possible that this is from another, larger, West Country Dish variant but it is not possible to be certain due to the absence of profile or perforation. None of the open forms is decorated.

46: Simple flattened rim. D approx. 460mm, context 1412.

#### *Pitchers (Fig. 11, 47-52)*

There are six sherds (167g) from six different unglazed hand-built handled pitchers. There is nothing resembling a foot in the assemblage, with the improbable exception of no. 50, suggesting that these vessels were not tripod pitchers. Four of the pitcher sherds are made from fabric TNF002, one is in fabric TNF003 and one in TNF007. One of the TNF002 handle sherds has a central lug at one end for attachment to the main body of the vessel. This vessel type dates from c. 1150-1250 (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, 126).

47: Upper part of a handle where it joins the body, decorated with a double row of impressed dimples. Reduced dark grey core and reoxidised red surfaces. TNF002, context 473.

48: Lower part of a handle including the 'tenon' by which it would have been attached to the body, decorated with a double row of dimples. Body much more coarse than 47, reduced grey core and reoxidised red surfaces. TNF002, context 492.

49: Body sherd with applied vertical strip. Body reduced black. TNF002, context 824.

50: Top of a strap handle with central ridge. Reduced grey core and buff surfaces. TNF002, context 1430.

51: Base of a strap handle decorated with four parallel thumbed grooves. The body has a reduced grey core and partially reoxidised buff to grey surface. TNF002, context 1435.

52: Possibly a very abraded plain rim with the stub of a plain strap handle. The body has a reduced grey core and reoxidised red surfaces. TNF003, context 565.

#### *Jugs (Fig. 12, 53-58)*

The assemblage contains 99 sherds (1,181g) from jugs, in six different fabrics (TNF009, TNF010, TNF014, TNF015, TNF017 and TNF019) from a maximum of 19 different vessels. The majority (70 sherds, 940g) are in fabric TNF010. This includes 57 sherds which form much of the lower part of a single vessel (no. 55). The sherd of TNF 017 (possible Ham Green B) is too fragmentary to illustrate.

53: Stub at the bottom of a rod handle. Reduced speckled

olive green glaze; thumbed onto vessel at base. TNF009, context 543.

54: Lower half of a wheel-thrown jug with thumbed base and stub of strap handle. Soft-fired and abraded, reduced light grey core, reoxidised red inner surface but most of the external reduced green glaze has been burnt or worn off leaving the layer of reduced body beneath. Base D 300mm. TNF010, context 466. Form probably 13th century.

55: Two adjoining sherds of a strap handle. Very abraded, reduced green glaze almost completely worn, soft-fired reoxidised red body TNF010, context 466.

56: Rim, very soft-fired and abraded with traces of a white slip under a reduced light green glaze. The body is wholly reoxidised red. D approx. 136mm, TNF010, context 1003.

57: Four body sherds; wheel-thrown with reduced green glaze over fabric with reduced grey core and red reoxidised inner margins. TNF014, context 1063.

58: Rim of hand-built jug with applied thumbed strip and clay worked into a bearded face-mask overlying a single incised line. D approx. 110mm. Reduced dark green glaze mostly burnt off. Fabric with reduced grey core and reoxidised light buff margins. If a transitional Ham Green product it can be dated to c. 1175 onward (Ponsford 1991, 91-5, 98). TNF019, context 1467.

### **Discussion**

The assemblage is made up mainly of coarseware jars, with a few pitchers and a specialist open form which appears to be a variant of the West Country Dish. There is no evidence that the vast majority of the pottery is earlier in date than the 11th century, or later than c. 1275. The small collection of wheel-thrown jug sherds is mostly abraded and probably dates from towards the end of this period of domestic occupation. The overall impression is of a mixed and scattered assemblage, with a few larger groups of fresh sherds, mainly from ditches and a small number of pits and postholes.

Unfortunately no pottery was associated with F129 for which a radiocarbon date was obtained. If there had been, it would have helped close the almost aceramic gap in the sequence of pottery from Somerset from c. 650 to c. 850 noted by Rahtz almost 50 years ago (Rahtz 1974, 103-4). Thereafter there is a sequence in the use and dominance of hand-built jars into the 14th century exemplified by continuation of the use of the Upper Greensand derived fabric, by production at Ham Green (Bristol Pottery Type 114 – 12th century) and vessels from the group from pit 6 behind Wells Museum (13th/14th century) (Ponsford 1991, 84-9; Dawson *et al.* 2015, 131-3; Allan *et al.* 2018, 86). The form of the jar undergoes many changes over that period of time. It is



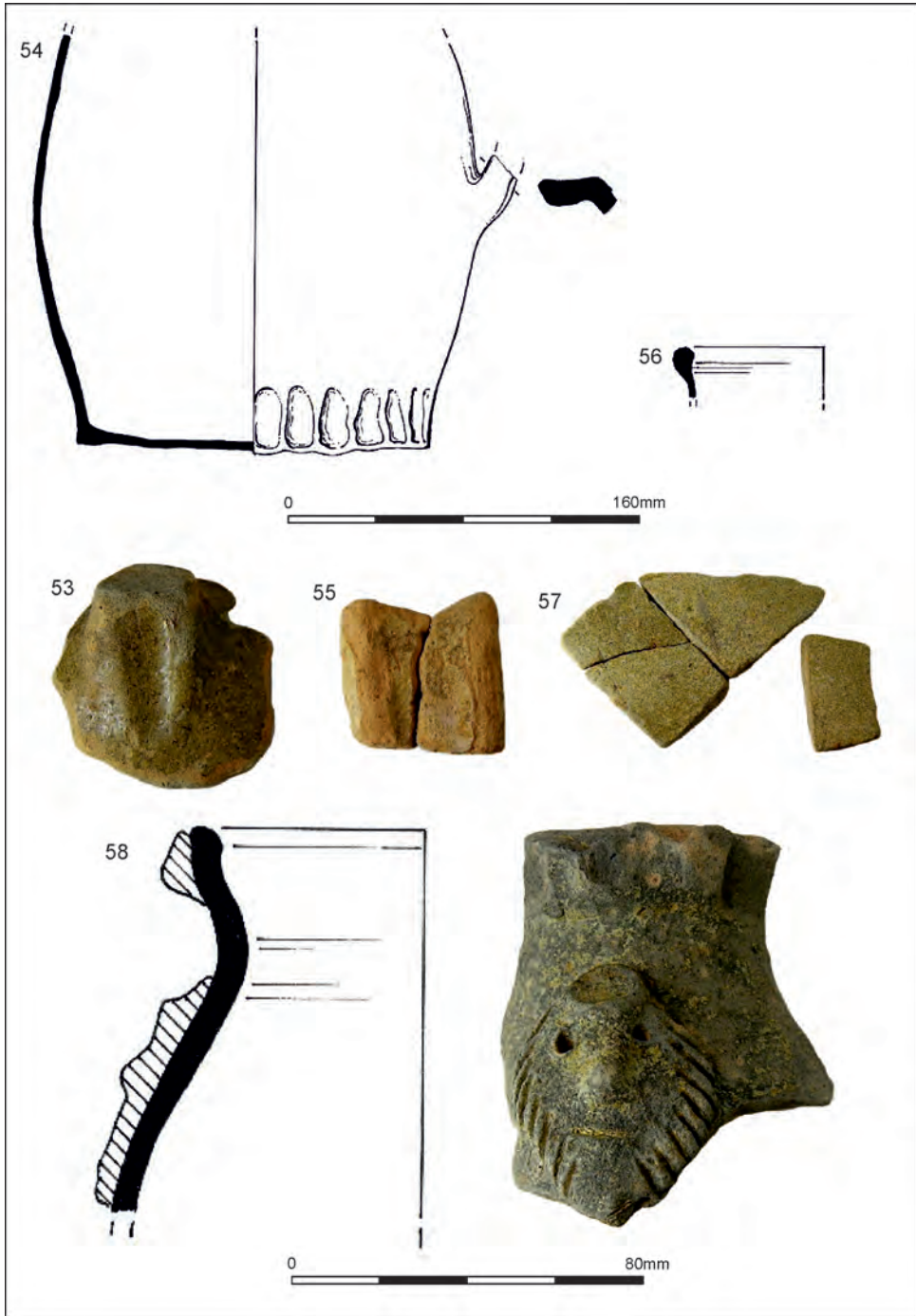


Fig. 12 Late 12th/13th-century jugs, 53 in fabric TNF009, 54-56 in TNF10, 57 in TNF014, 58 in TNF019 (?transitional Ham Green)

the close resemblance between the forms of the Nerrols Farm pottery and those from excavations in Taunton that pin the date of the Nerrols Farm pottery to no earlier than the 11th century or later than c. 1275 (Pearson 1984; Dawson with Dawson 2016).

Although forms may be similar, it is striking how different is the assemblage in its fabrics from those of the town and castle of Taunton just 3km away. Only TNF002, admittedly the most copious fabric found on the site and which seems to be an Upper Greensand derived fabric used for jars, pitchers and West Country dishes, appears in Taunton as well. The jugs are similarly distinct apart from the two possible Ham Green products. This reinforces the growing evidence that assemblages are perhaps not surprisingly very different between urban and rural localities even where as in this case the localities are very close. The contrast between Glastonbury Abbey and Shapwick may be cited. Further, research on assemblages from six parishes across 17km of Mendip suggests that at this date the bulk of coarseware making is very local, even peculiar to that settlement (Andersen *et al.* forthcoming). So, Nerrols Farm helps form a better idea of how the distribution of types of pottery provides evidence more susceptible to nuanced interpretation than often thought possible.

#### METALWORK

*Naomi Payne*

The metal finds were x-rayed to aid identification. The medieval metalwork includes a probable slater's pick and two unidentified fragments.

#### SLAG AND HEARTH/OVEN LINING

*Naomi Payne*

A total of 44 pieces (437g) of slag was recovered from eight contexts. This material generally comprised small quantities of undiagnostic iron working slag and vitrified hearth/oven lining. A possible smithing hearth bottom was collected from overlying deposits. Context 130, fill of early-medieval pit F129, contained 27 pieces (21g) of the iron working slag and also produced 31 pieces (102g) of hearth or oven lining. None of the slag or hearth lining provides *in situ* evidence for metalworking on the site, but its presence suggests that smithing was undertaken nearby.

#### ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

Environmental bulk soil samples were collected for the potential recovery of environmental material including charred plant remains to provide information on the agricultural economy and human activities at the site

during the medieval period. Eighteen samples were taken and processed in a 'Siraf' type flotation tank using mesh sizes of 0.25mm and 0.5mm for the recovery of the flot and residue respectively. Preservation of environmental remains, however, was generally poor and only two samples were subsequently selected for further plant macrofossil and charcoal study; from the fill (130) (sample 2) of pit F129 radiocarbon dated on the basis of two charred grains to 1111 ± BP (890 to 985 cal AD) and from the fill (1109) (sample 12) of medieval pit F1107.

#### Plant macrofossils

*John A Giorgi*

All identifiable charred plant remains were sorted and quantified from the sampled oven/furnace fill (130) while the large flot (353ml) from pit fill (1109) was sub-sampled using a riffle box, 25% being sorted and the charred remains counted and the remaining fraction scanned for additional information. The species from the scanned fraction of this flot together with charcoal, small indeterminate cereal grain fragments (<2mm) and unidentifiable items in both samples were recorded and scored using the following rating system: + =1-10; ++=11-50; +++=51-150; ++++=151-250; +++++=250+ items. The charred plant remains were identified using a binocular microscope (with a magnification of up to x40) together with modern and charred reference material and reference manuals (Cappers *et al.* 2006; Jacomet 2006).

The bulk of the charred plant remains consisted of cereal grains with only traces of cereal chaff, a small number of legumes (including cultivated pulses) and wild plant/weed seeds; virtually all this material was recovered from the medieval pit fill (1109), only a small assemblage, mainly cereal grains, being found in pit fill (130) (Table 3). Taxonomic order for the wild plants following Stace (1997) was also used for ecological data together with Hanf (1983) and Wilson and King (2003). There follows a general discussion of the results based almost entirely on the charred plant remains from pit fill (1109) and then an examination of the two individual assemblages for potential information on activities that may have produced these remains.

#### Cereals

Cereal grains made up the bulk of the identifiable charred plant remains although poor preservation meant that over half (c. 59%) of the grains could not be identified; there was also a large number of small (<2mm) unquantifiable grain fragments in pit fill (1109).

Wheat (*Triticum*) was by far the best represented cereal accounting for almost 90% of all identifiable grains, the well-preserved wheat grains belonging to

TABLE 3 THE CHARRED PLANT REMAINS

	Period	EMED	MED	
	feature	PIT	PIT	
	cut number	F129	F1107	
	context type	FILL	FILL	
	context number	130	1109	
	sample number	2	12	
	vol sample (l)	17	15	
	vol flot (ml)	135	353	
	% sorted	100%	25%	
	% scanned			75%
LATIN_NAME	ENGLISH			
<b>Cereal grains</b>				
<i>Triticum aestivum/turgidum</i> type	free-threshing wheat		17	++++
<i>T. cf. aestivum/turgidum</i> type	?free-threshing wheat	1	35	
<i>Triticum</i> spp.	wheat	3	11	+++
cf. <i>Triticum</i> sp(p).	?wheat	1	10	
<i>Triticum/Secale cereale</i> L.	wheat/rye		3	+
cf. <i>Secale cereale</i>	?rye		4	+
cf. <i>Hordeum vulgare</i>	?barley			+
<i>Avena</i> spp.	oat		2	++
cf. <i>Avena</i> spp.	?oat		3	
Cerealina indet.	indet. cereal	3	125	+++++
Cerealina indet.	indet cereal fragments <2mm	+	+++	
<b>Cereal chaff</b>				
<i>Triticum aestivum</i> type	hexaploid wheat rachis			+
<i>Triticum aestivum/turgidum</i> type	free-threshing wheat rachis			+
<i>Secale cereale</i> L.	rye rachis		1	+
<i>Avena</i> spp.	oat awn fragments			+
<b>Other plant/weed seeds</b>				
<i>Atriplex</i> sp(p).	orache		1	+
<i>Fallopia convulvulus</i> (L.) A Love	black bindweed			+
<i>Rumex acetosella</i> gp.	sheep's sorrel		1	
<i>Rumex</i> spp.	dock			+
<i>Vicia faba</i> L.	field bean		1	+
cf <i>V. faba</i>	?field bean		1	
<i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> spp.	vetch/tare/vetchling >2mm		2	+
<i>Vicia/Lathyrus/Pisum</i> spp.	vetch/tare/vetchling/pea >2mm		2	+
<i>Vicia/Lathyrus</i> spp.	vetch/tare/vetchling <2mm		11	+++
<i>Vicia/Lathyrus/Pisum</i> spp.	vetch/tare/vetchling/pea <2mm			++
Fabaceae indet	large fragments/cotyledons >2mm		3	
Fabaceae indet	small rounded legumes <2mm		19	+++

<i>Euphrasia/Odontites</i> spp.	eyebrights/bartsias			+
<i>Galium aparine</i> L.	cleavers		1	+
<i>Anthemis arvensis</i> L.	corn chaomomile			+
<i>Anthemis cotula</i> L.	stinking chamomile		5	+
<i>Chrysanthemum segetum</i> L.	corn marigold			+
<i>Carex</i> spp.	sedge			+
<i>Bromus</i> sp(p).	brome	1		+
Poaceae indet.	wild grasses (large seeds)?cereals		12	++
indeterminate	wood charcoal	+++++		+++++
indeterminate			+	+
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>270</b>	
	<i>item density (per litre of processed soil)</i>	<i>0.5</i>	<i>72e</i>	
<i>Item frequency: + =1-10; ++ = 11-50; +++ = 51-150; ++++ =151-250; +++++ = 250+ items</i>				
<i>e = projected density based on sub sample</i>				

free-threshing wheat, either hexaploid bread wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) and/or tetraploid rivet wheat (*T. turgidum*); it is difficult to separate these two species on the basis of grain morphology alone although traces of free-threshing wheat rachis fragments in the scanned flot fraction of pit fill (1109) included evidence for the presence of bread wheat.

Other cereals were very poorly represented including a small number of oat (*Avena*) grains, this cereal also identified on the basis of a few awn fragments. It was not possible, however, to establish if the oats were from cultivated and/or wild species because of the absence of diagnostic oat floret bases. There were also a few grains tentatively identified as barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and rye (*Secale cereale*) although the definite presence of rye was confirmed by several rachis fragments in pit fill (1109).

All four cereals, free-threshing (including bread) wheat, barley, rye and oats are the most frequent grains found in archaeobotanical assemblages from the medieval period and were the main cereals cultivated at this time in southern Britain (Greig 1991, 321; Moffett 2006, 45). The evidence from the site suggests that free-threshing (including bread) wheat was the main cereal being grown and used at the site, although this is based only on the evidence from one sample.

Charred plant remains from an earlier evaluation at Nerrols Farm also showed the presence of free-threshing wheat along with hulled and naked barley and oats in 11th to 13th-century deposits at the site although there was no record of the relative abundance of these cereals (Deighton 2010).

Archaeobotanical evidence from other sites in Somerset, however, does suggest that free-threshing wheat was an important, if not the dominant cereal in this area during the medieval period. This includes several

sites close-by, for example charred plant remains in 12th to 14th-century deposits from an evaluation at 7-8 East Street, Taunton, consisting mainly of free-threshing wheat grains, while oat grains were also common but with only occasional rye and traces of barley grain (Wessex Archaeology 2005). Free-threshing wheat was also the best represented cereal in medieval samples from excavations at Taunton Priory with some oats but little barley and rye (Greig and Osborne 1984). It was also the main cereal found as charred remains in medieval deposits from sites further afield to the north and east of Nerrols Farm; at Brent Knoll (McKenna and Hall 2008), Whitegate Farm, Bleadon (Smith 2003), Shapwick House just west of Glastonbury (Smith and Campbell 2007) and West Wick, Weston-super-Mare (Pelling 2009).

Bread wheat was identified on the basis of a few rachis fragments at Nerrols Farm and tends to be the more common of the two free-threshing wheat species during the medieval period (Moffett 2006, 49), rachis fragments from other medieval sites in Somerset showing the presence of bread wheat at Taunton Priory (Greig and Osborne 1984) and Whitegate Farm (Smith 2003). Rachis evidence for rivet wheat, however, was also found at Taunton Priory (Greig and Osborne 1984), Shapwick House (Smith and Campbell 2007) and West Wick (Pelling 2009) suggesting that both free-threshing wheats may have been cultivated during this period in this area of south-west England.

Wheat was the most valued cereal during the medieval period (Hammond 1995, 2) and the main bread making grain (along with rye), wheaten flour also being used for pies and pastries. The other poorly represented cereals (including oats in mixes) may have also been used for bread and in pottage (Campbell *et al.* 1993, 24-5). There were no germinated grains to suggest that any of the cereals were being used for brewing at the site. Barley and oats were also used as animal feed.

### Pulses

There were occasional finds of field bean (*Vicia faba*) in pit fill (1109) while the indeterminate larger legumes may also belong to cultivated species, probably beans or peas. Pulses, including beans and peas, are frequently found in medieval deposits in southern England but usually only in small amounts (Greig 1991, 323; Moffet 2006, 53); both beans and peas were also found in an earlier evaluation at Nerrols Farm (Deighton 2010) as well as at other medieval sites in Somerset including Brent Knoll (McKenna and Hall 2008), Whitegate Farm (Smith 2003) and West Wick (Pelling 2009).

Beans and peas may have been grown as garden vegetables or field crops and may have been used for human food, together with cereals for bread and in pottage, particularly by the poor and following poor cereal harvests, as well as for fodder. Pulses were also grown as a means of restoring nitrogen to the soil as part of crop rotation (Campbell *et al.* 1993, 134).

### Wild plants/weed seeds

There were relatively few wild plants/weed seeds from a fairly limited range of species in fill (1109), most of which are probably crop weeds given their presence with mainly cereal grains; as such, these remains may provide information on aspects of crop husbandry. The potential arable weeds suggest the cultivation of different soils types; *Anthemis cotula* (stinking chamomile) and *Galium aparine* (cleaver) may indicate the use of clay loams around the site for growing crops including the alluvial clays to the south, while *Chrysanthemum segetum* (corn marigold) and *Fallopia convolvulus* (black bindweed) may reflect the cultivation of sandy loamy soils in the area. Occasional *Carex* (sedges) seeds may point to the use of damper areas of ground for growing crops. Similar charred weed seeds including *Anthemis cotula* and *Chrysanthemum segetum* were found in medieval deposits at Taunton Priory (Greig and Osborne 1984) and 7-8 East Street, Taunton (Wessex Archaeology 2005), possible evidence for the cultivation of both sandy and heavier soils in this area.

While the different crops represented at Nerrols Farm may grow in a range of soils, bread wheat is the most demanding in terms of nutrient requirements and would have been best suited to the clay (including the alluvial) soils around the site, while oats, rye and barley are less demanding in terms of nutrient requirements and may have been grown on the less fertile free-draining loamy soils to the east and west of the farm. The presence of a good number of small leguminous seeds, probably weed seeds, in pit fill (1109) may be indicative of low levels of soil fertility possibly from over-cropping in the area, these plants thriving in soils with low nitrogen levels;

*Rumex acetosella* (sheep's sorrel), found in sandy loams, is also characteristic of poor arable land.

The weed seeds also provide potential evidence on sowing times; *Galium aparine* (cleaver) may point to the autumn sowing of crops, free-threshing (bread) wheat (and rye) usually being sown at this time while *Chrysanthemum segetum* and *Fallopia convolvulus* may suggest spring-sowing of cereals, oats and barley being often sown at this time. There is little evidence to shed light on harvesting techniques although a few fairly low growing weeds including *Anthemis cotula* and *Rumex acetosella*, may indicate that the cereals were cut low on the stem, straw being a valuable asset, having various uses including as fuel, livestock bedding and fodder and thatching.

### Pit F129

The charred plant remains consisted of a very small number of poorly preserved charred grains including several wheat grains, one tentatively identified as free-threshing wheat. There was also a single weed seed of *Bromus* (brome); seeds of this wild grass are often found in virtually clean cereals because of the difficulty of separating this grain-sized seed from the cereals.

The presence of furnace/oven lining fragments together with slag in the pit fill suggests that industrial activity including smithing was probably being carried out in the vicinity of this feature. The few charred grains in the sample may have been accidentally burnt while being dried before milling or storage or during cooking. It is difficult, however, to establish whether these few grains derive from possibly occasional use of an oven for such activities or were incidentally incorporated into the pit, either from low-level domestic activities taking place close-by or as part of tinder (straw) used to fuel an oven/furnace for industrial use.

### Pit F1107

The sampled fill produced a rich assemblage and virtually all of the charred plant remains from the site with a projected item density of 72 per litre of processed soil (based on the quantified sorted sub-sample). The charred remains consisted mainly of cereal grains which accounted for approximately 78% of the quantified material although this percentage would have been greater had it been possible to include the large numbers of small unquantifiable grain fragments in the sample. The other charred plant remains consisted of a few cultivated pulses and wild plant/weed seeds and only traces of cereal chaff.

The charred remains in this sample represent an almost fully processed crop of free-threshing (bread) wheat with very few impurities (weed seeds) remaining; initial cleaning including threshing of the cereals would



have probably been taking place out in the fields before being brought onto site. The grains in the sample may have been accidentally burnt while being dried before milling and/or storage (possibly in a corn dryer) before being dumped in the pit along with spent fuel (the charcoal and possibly the weed seeds). The presence of small amounts of other grains and legumes in the sample may be from the use of the same fields for growing cereals or perhaps from the use of the same areas/features for processing the different crops.

### Summary

The charred plant remains show that free-threshing (bread) wheat was the main cereal being cultivated and used on the site during the medieval period, with the other cereals (oats, rye and possibly barley) only playing a minor role (if any) in the agricultural economy of the settlement. These results, however, are based virtually entirely on the evidence from just one sample, although charred remains from other sites close-by and further afield suggest that free-threshing wheat (including the cultivation of both bread and rivet wheat) was an important if not the dominant cereal in this area of Somerset during the medieval period.

The few weed seeds may suggest the cultivation of clay and sandy loams around the site. Free-threshing wheat would have been well suited to the heavier soils, while the other cereals could have been grown in the less fertile ones and legumes, including field bean, may have been grown as part of crop rotation to restore nitrogen to the soil. There is limited evidence for both the spring and autumn sowing of crops.

Virtually all the charred plant remains were from pit fill (1109) containing the burnt remains of almost fully processed free-threshing (bread) wheat, suggesting that activities associated with the drying of grain (before milling/storage) and food preparation may have been taking place in this area of the site, the earlier processing activities, including threshing, probably being carried out either in the fields where the crops were being grown or in a threshing barn.

### Charcoal

#### *Dana Challinor*

The condition of the charcoal was fair, abundant in quantity with good sized fragments, but some infusion of sediment. Standard identification procedures were followed, using wood identification keys (Schweingruber 1990; Hather 2000) and modern reference material. The charcoal was fractured and examined at low magnification (up to x45), with representative fragments examined in longitudinal sections at high magnification

(up to x400). Observations on maturity were made where possible. Classification and nomenclature follow Stace (1997).

#### *Pit F129*

This was associated with metalworking waste. The charcoal was dominated by *Quercus* sp. (oak), with some heartwood recorded. Metalworking activities require the use of charcoal fuel to achieve the high temperatures necessary for smelting or smithing. Mature oak would be suitable as a charcoal fuel and is commonly found in Roman and Romano-British metalworking waste assemblages (e.g. Calstock; Challinor 2014). Medieval evidence, however, tends to produce more diverse charcoal assemblages. Documentary sources for the later medieval period indicates that charcoal was made from roundwood of 6cm to 25cm in diameter, sawn into lengths of about 1m, which were then seasoned, prior to burning in a domed stack covered over with turf (Bond 2007, 280-90). A series of 9th to 10th-century smelting furnaces at Hemyock, Devon (Challinor 2018) and a Late Saxon smelting site at Burlescombe, Devon (Gale 2006), produced charcoal assemblages with both oak heartwood and narrow roundwood, along with a range of additional taxa.

#### *Pit F1107*

The charcoal assemblage from this feature comprised *Alnus glutinosa* (alder) and *Prunus* sp. (blackthorn/cherry). It is likely that the majority of the *Alnus/Corylus* charcoal derived from *Alnus* but there was one possible *Corylus* (hazel) fragment. Numerous insect tunnels, with frass, were observed in the alder, indicating that the wood was quite infested at the time of burning. Alder is not traditionally considered a good fuelwood unless well-seasoned (Edlin 1949), so the assemblage may represent seasoned or gathered dead wood. All of the charcoal derived from narrow roundwood, which would have produced a short-lived fire.

### RADIOCARBON DATING

Suitable material was selected for radiocarbon dating from the sample selected for detailed plant macrofossil analyses of pit F129. The AMS radiocarbon date result is given in Table 4. Calibration of the result has been performed using the data set published by Reimer *et al.* (2013) and performed using the program OxCal4.3.2 (c14.arch.ox.ac.uk).

TABLE 4 RADIOCARBON DATING RESULTS (CALIBRATED TO 95.4% PROBABILITY)

Material	Context	Lab no.	Result BP	$\delta C_{13}$ (‰)	Cal AD
Charred Plant Remains: Wheat	Fill (130) of pit F129	SUERC-81228 (GU48545)	1111±21	-22.6	890-985

## DISCUSSION

Nerrols is an historic farmstead with the current building dating to the 17th century (NHLE 1344490; HER 40472). The farm buildings are located a short distance to the north of the excavation area. Historic documentation indicates that it has formerly been known as *Norrols*, *Northwalls* and was *Narrols* in 1808 (Bush 1994; SHC DD/DP 53/8), *Nerrals* on the 1837 tithe apportionment and the current spelling appears on the first edition 25-inch Ordnance Survey map of 1889. Robin Bush (see Gathercole 2002) has previously proposed, on the basis of 17th-century documentary evidence, that Nerrols was originally a single holding with Maidenbrook Farm, and that the former 'North' prefix of the Nerrols placename was established in relation to Maidenbrook, which is located 400m to the south-east of Nerrols Farm. In the first half of the 20th century the two farms were separated from one another only by a lane and two fields; one of which contained the excavation.

Maidenbrook is mentioned in the Exon Domesday of 1086 as *Maidenbroche*, one of the Taunton properties of the Bishops of Winchester. It survives as a Grade II listed building within a residential development (NHLE 1344536; HER nos 26678 and 44636). Two adjacent ponds were previously regarded as potentially marking the position of a squared medieval moated area (HER no. 44012), but are now regarded as later in origin as one of the ponds forming the east side is not depicted on the Cheddon Fitzpaine Parish tithe map of 1837 and extensive archaeological works ahead of residential development at Maidenbrook Farm failed to find evidence for medieval settlement on the site (McDonnell 1990; Ferris and Bevan 1993; Ellis 1997).

Given the absence of medieval remains is it possible to suggest, albeit tentatively, that the excavated site is the location of 11th-century *Maidenbroche*? Further medieval reference to Maidenbrook includes a 'lord of Maidenbrook' being recorded in 1249 (Mead 1977 in Ellis 1997, 1), in 1268 the property comprising 'buildings, gardens, alder beds, meadows and pastures' was sold (SRS 1892, 217) and in 1280 Maidenbrook was mentioned in four legal cases, including the blocking of a thoroughfare (SRS 1929, 62, 66, 168). In 1366, by which time, according to the dating of the

pottery, the focus of the farmstead must have moved, Maidenbrook is listed as belonging to the Hospital of St John the Baptist, Bridgwater (Mead 1977 in Ellis 1997, 1). However, by this time the precursor to the Nerrols name may have been already associated with the site as in 1304-5 a William de Northwold is in dispute with Robert le Fitz Paen in regard to land in '*Cheden and Stoned ... juxta Brandon*' (SRS 1892, 345); this might suggest that the 'north' prefix was not given to Nerrols in relation to Maidenbrook, although the focus of Nerrols Farm is still to the north of the excavated site, albeit by a short distance.

The pottery indicates that the site was occupied between c. AD 1000-1275, but the radiocarbon date of 890 to 985 cal AD from pit F129 shows that the medieval use of the site may pre-date the range of dates shown by the ceramics. The apparent abandonment of pottery on rural sites in Somerset following the end of the Roman period and up to c. AD 950 means that apart from the evidence for iron working in pit F129 any other medieval activity pre-dating c. AD 1000 is artefactually invisible (see Webster 2000). It is probable that the area continued in agricultural use after the currency of the pottery in the late 13th century, despite no longer being the focus for settlement. Elsewhere in Somerset a significant hiatus of several centuries between the abandonment of medieval settlement and re-occupation in the post-medieval period has been observed with various causes being considered, such as plague, famine, climate change, changes to tenure and the role of ecclesiastical estates, but no one reason has been preferred (see, e.g., Powell 2009, 185). Aston (1982, 131) estimated that approximately 200 medieval farmsteads are known to have disappeared in the western part of Somerset.

The 1268 reference to buildings at Maidenbrook is of note given the possible house (S1481) exposed on the site. This was north-south aligned and measured approximately 8m by 5m, although no hearth was identified, probably due to plough truncation, which also meant that little detail could be established. No structural material was preserved and it must be assumed that it had wattle and daub, plank, cob or even turf walls (cf. Aston 2000) or a mixture of materials (cf. Ponsford 2003, also see below) and presumably a thatched roof

as no roofing stone was present. Saxo-Norman houses typically measure 8-10m long by 4-5m wide, which places the building within the expectations for a peasant dwelling (Hamerow 2012). Such buildings had currency up to the beginning of the 13th century, after which time a general feature of domestic architecture is that structural timbers are no longer buried in the ground, being set instead on post-pads or stone walls, with consequent improvements to longevity of buildings through the less frequent need to replace the timbers which have rotted at their base (Gardiner 2014). Reasons for this alteration in architecture may relate to economic change or the professionalisation of carpenters, meaning that the building superstructure was better constructed and no longer needed to be supported by buried posts (Dyer 1986).

Previous excavations, generally on a smaller scale than that at Nerrols, have provided evidence for abandoned rural farmsteads in Somerset. At Meadow Vale Farm, near Wincanton, a water pipeline crossed a house platform and a homogeneous assemblage of pottery indicated a short-lived occupation from the 12th to 13th centuries (Newman *et al.* 1994). At West Wick, Weston-Super-Mare, a sequence of intercutting ditches, a series of pits and a pond-like feature dated to the 11th and 12th centuries contained evidence for a settlement involved in pastoralism, but also, perhaps, salt making on a seasonal basis (Powell 2009). Neither of these sites revealed the full outline of structures, although parts may have been identified at Meadow Vale Farm; however, at Bickley, Cleeve, two building plans were uncovered. Cleeve is in North Somerset and excavations there over several years identified the ephemeral traces of two successive rectangular buildings of 12th century date, with the evidence indicating that the farmstead had been established in the 10th century, with it probably being abandoned before the end of the 12th century (Ponsford 2003). The earliest building was the smallest, measuring 6.5m by 3.5m. It may have been a workshop, but it was replaced, possibly after destruction by fire, by the later larger building, which measured 10m by 5m and was interpreted as a house, although the possibility that it was subsidiary building was also entertained. The inconsistent pattern of post and stake holes along with the lack of evidence for construction materials, meant that the excavator proposed that the walls were constructed of cob, within which an irregular wooden structure would have been hidden by the thickness of the walls.

The western bounds of the settlement appear to match a north-south aligned track to Nerrols Farm. The evaluation found no archaeological features of medieval date immediately to the west side and this may

indicate that this track marked a boundary that was long established (Mason 2010). It may also be significant that the mapping of soils indicates that they are less fertile on the west of this line, although more free draining than the soil of the settlement site (Cranfield University 2019). The evidence provided by the Cheddon Fitzpaine tithe map and apportionment of 1837 shows that the arable land belonging to Nerrols was to the west of the holding, with the field directly to the west of the track in pasture and the field containing the excavation meadow. Use of the field as meadow indicates a damper situation adjacent to the Maiden Brook (which runs parallel on the west side of Maidenbrook Lane) and this is certainly supported by the maze of ditches uncovered. The name of the field on the tithe apportionment is slightly difficult to read, but the consensus appears to be 'Tidburys Nine Acres'. A 'bury' suffix to a placename would often be regarded as relating to *beorg* meaning a 'hill' or more often a barrow or burial mound. Clearly the field is not located on a hill, so an archaeological association may be preferred. However, Aston *et al.* (2010, 74), following Margaret Gelling, have pointed out that in Somerset and Dorset it often derives from *bearu*, which refers to a small wood, and if the Tidburys final 's' does not indicate a personal name, then it is perhaps best to interpret the 'bury' element of the placename as meaning that this area, or part of it, was once wooded; any woodland was most probably closest to the brook particularly given the evidence for alder beds (see below). It is also of note that the land adjacent to the west, currently including the Taunton suburb of Priorswood, was in medieval times a wooded area belonging to Taunton Priory (Gathercole 2002, 52-3; HER 44439).

The archaeological evidence makes it clear that through the period of settlement on the site ditches for drainage and enclosure were considered essential. There is no expectation that lower status rural settlements in Late Saxon or post-Conquest times would themselves be enclosed. Gardiner (2011) has noted that in the 10th and 11th centuries farmsteads were often located in the angles of ditched field boundaries, which matches well the situation prevailing at Nerrols Farm. The evidence for the economy prevailing was limited by the generally poor survival of bone and ecofacts on the site. In general, rural communities in the medieval period tried for a balance of resources with the aim of being as close to self-sufficient as possible. However, this ideal could be difficult to achieve. For example, Mick Aston in a detailed study of the archaeology and history of Winscombe parish in North Somerset found that the geography of the parish on the edge of the Levels meant that pastoralism was probably far more important than arable farming (Aston *et al.* 2011).

At Nerrols the medieval economy appears to have

been mixed with cereals and pulses grown and some evidence for cattle and sheep husbandry, although bone was very poorly preserved (Mason 2010; Coles 2018). This was further established by the suggestion that structure S587 was possibly a type of open-fronted cattle shed known as a linhay and, if such a tentative interpretation is accepted, then this would be a good indication of animal husbandry on the site, but a very early example of such a structure of this specific and vernacular type. Documentary evidence for a slightly later period (1250-1520) shows that almost all peasants provided themselves with a barn and it would also be normal to have a separate building for livestock (Dyer 2013). Once again, the Cheddon Fitzpaine tithe records of 1837 are useful, indicating that the Nerrols holding had a mix of arable, pasture and meadow, which would have supported a mixed agri-pastoral economy at this time, although it also important to note that the 1268 sales document for Maidenbrook mentions specifically pastures and meadows, but not arable land, perhaps indicating that pastoralism was more important.

Animal husbandry on a peasant farmstead would not have been for the consumption of meat which was largely the prerogative of the elite of society (Aston *et al.* 2010). A plant-based diet was typical peasant food and the charred plant remains show that free-threshing (bread) wheat was the main cereal being cultivated and used on the site during the medieval period, with the other cereals (oats, rye and possibly barley) only playing a minor role (if any) in the agricultural economy of the settlement. This contrasts with the mixed cropping found generally throughout the medieval period in south-west England, although the evidence for the Late Saxon period is particularly poor (Rippon and Gould 2021). Legumes including field bean may have been grown as part of crop rotation to restore nitrogen to the soil.

The charcoal assemblage comprised *Alnus glutinosa* (alder) and *Prunus* sp. (blackthorn/cherry); at the time of the excavation woodland was restricted to the banks of the Maiden Brook and surrounding the farm buildings. Alder is not traditionally considered a good fuelwood unless well-seasoned, so the assemblage may represent seasoned or gathered dead wood. In this regard it is interesting to note that *alder beds* are listed specifically in the sale document of 1268. Alder trees are suited to damp conditions and although not growing to a size which would be regarded as providing timber for large structures, stands of alder would be valuable in providing many of the other products of woodlands such as firewood, charcoal and coppice poles for a variety of uses such as hurdles for fencing. That the alder beds were specifically listed in the medieval document relating to Maidenbrook shows that it was regarded as an important and valuable resource.

Woodland was certainly one of the elements of the balance of resources talked about by Aston *et al.* (2011), but more specifically, once again at Winscombe, the value of an alder grove called *Durnehete*, which it was still possible to identify on a tithe map of 1840, is confirmed by it being given as an endowment in 1236 by Henry Lovestheft to St James church, Winscombe (Aston *et al.* 2010, 99). Further evidence of the value of alder woodland is provided by a document relating to the Dean of Wells who in 1337 took proceedings against a man for cutting down many alder trees on Stan Moor in the Levels (cited in Coles and Coles 1986, 22).

The archaeological excavations revealed a large network of medieval ditches, perhaps not previously exposed at this scale, that reflect the requirements for drainage, but also appear to define the boundaries of small fields (or closes), enclosures and possibly trackways. The alignments established by the primary medieval ditches tend to be maintained throughout the medieval occupation of the site, but changes to the enclosures and the access to them are evident. Within these ditches were located the ephemeral traces indicating a small medieval farmstead dating between the 11th and 13th centuries and potentially comprising at least a house and a barn. It has been tentatively suggested that this may be the settlement of *Maidenbroche* mentioned in 1068, the location for which must have shifted after the 13th century, with it eventually located a short distance to the south-east.

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