

## **Medieval to Post-Medieval (c.1100-1700/50)**

### **Summary of the Collections:**

By far the most significant assemblage of Medieval material in the Museum's collections is that excavated by Peter Addyman and his students between 1964 and 1972 at Ludgershall Castle (Ellis 2000). These excavations produced a varied, well-preserved and well-stratified small finds assemblage which includes architectural fragments, fixtures and fittings, dress accessories and an exceptionally well-preserved assemblage of vessel and painted-window glass. Significantly, the excavations produced a huge assemblage of 47,000 sherds (570kg) of pottery, with the assemblage dating from the 10<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the medieval period and beyond. The ceramics are dominated by local coarse wares, but fabrics from across Wiltshire are represented, although imports are relatively rare. In addition to the ceramics and wider small finds assemblage, the museum also holds a substantial collection of animal remains from Ludgershall Castle, although these were not discussed in the eventual publication of the site.

The museum holds a smaller, but complimentary, assemblage excavated at Chapel Meadow, Ramsbury (also referred to as Membury), by Grimes in 1941. The excavations revealed a complex of building foundations beginning in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and originally interpreted as a castle (Grimes in O'Neill 1948), but now thought to represent a fortified manorial site (Creighton 2000). Although the small find and animal bone assemblages are relatively small, c. 9,000 sherds from the excavations are held by the museum. Sadly, Hilary Heally passed away prior to completing her attempt to publish the site in the 1990s, although the museum continues to hold Grimes' site records. A further complimentary assemblage was excavated by Thompson at Huish parish church, and the field immediately to the north (Thompson 1967; 1972). These excavations revealed evidence of buildings and workshops dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> centuries and produced a stratified assemblage of c. 1000 sherds as well as an interesting collection of small finds including multiple iron tools, locks and keys, and a well-preserved steelyard weight and balance arm with surviving mechanism (Shortt 1968). The original site records were similarly reportedly deposited with the museum (Thompson 1972), although they have not been located at the time of writing.

Most of the other Medieval to Post-Medieval assemblages within the collections are relatively small on their own, but cumulatively represent a reasonable coverage of the collecting area throughout the period. These smaller assemblages include that associated with UCL excavations of New Park Street, Devizes, where limited evidence for 13<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> century was identified, although it was badly disturbed by later activity (Russell 1993). Whilst the animal bone and small finds assemblage is limited, the New Park Street Assemblage continues into post-Medieval period, with c. 1200 sherds from the latter, compared to just c. 300 from the former. A much smaller but similarly dated assemblage was recovered during rescue excavations behind Wooton Bassett High Street (Currie 1995), with similarly ephemeral evidence for medieval occupation. Limited excavations near to the site of Postern Mill, Malmesbury, in 1986-7 by Wiltshire Rescue Archaeology Project, revealed a stratified sequence reflecting continuous occupation from the 10<sup>th</sup> century to post-medieval period. An assemblage of c. 300 sherds was recovered, as well as a small assemblage of small finds. Unfortunately, metal working debris and animal bone from the site do not appear to have been retained (Currie 1993). Also from Malmesbury, at the site of the Old Cinema excavated by Cotswold Archaeology in 2002, an assemblage of c. 300 sherds of 12-13<sup>th</sup> century ceramics was recovered (Hart and Holbrook 2011). Additionally, the museum holds a relatively large quantity of

material from various excavations around Cricklade carried out during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where the ceramic sequence probably dates to the 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Aside from the late-Saxon ceramics (Jope in Radford 1972), the pottery has never been discussed in detail, and indeed does not appear to have been retained in the case of Haslam's 1975 excavations. An assemblage of metalwork attributed to the latter excavation was not described as part of the eventual publication (Haslam 2003).

Along with the Ludgershall Castle assemblage, the other most significant individual medieval assemblage in the Museum collections is probably that from the Naish Hill Kilns (also called Nash Hill), near Lacock (McCarthy et al. 1974). These excavations revealed a stratified sequence of tile and pottery kilns dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, and recovered an assemblage of over 9,000 pottery sherds, including an exceptional dragon-decorated jug, as well as a large assemblage of both decorated and undecorated tiles. At the time of excavation the British Museum attempted to scientifically link the tiles to those from Stanley Abbey, but this was inconclusive. Stamps from the kiln are present at both Stanley and Lacock Abbeys, whereas some of the tiles produced at Naish Hill have no local parallels, but are recognised at sites such as Glastonbury Abbey. By contrast, the non-ceramic finds assemblage was described by the excavator as "meagre in the extreme" (McCarthy et al. 1974: 106) and was mostly unstratified; it doesn't appear to have been retained. A further dump of kiln debris and wasters associated with the industry was excavated by F.K. Annable and the WANHS field group.

A second kiln site, as well as associated buildings, were excavated at Langley Burrell by Dr. Ron Wilcox and Chippenham Technical College students in 1978-9 (HER: ST97NW459). These excavations produced an extremely large assemblage of artefacts which are now in the museum's collections, although as the site has never been published the finds have never been described or even given basic quantification. The assemblage includes a large quantity of pottery relating to the kilns, but also a wider assemblage of animal bone, small finds, worked flint and iron working debris. Vince (1984) has briefly described the fabric and suggests that the kilns can be dated to the late 15<sup>th</sup> to early 16<sup>th</sup> century based on analogy with the nearby Musty industry, although he also notes a mid/late-14<sup>th</sup> century archaeomagnetic date from one of the kilns, and suggests that many of the forms from Langley Burrell are known in other fabrics from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, no original records from the excavation survive in either the Wiltshire Museum or Historic Environment Record archive (although some material may be present within the Chippenham Museum). The museum also holds a small representative sample of material attributed to the Minety Kilns, although the majority of material from Musty's (1973) excavations are now in the collections of Swindon Museum. The identification of a related 'kiln' at Hunt's Mill, Wooton Bassett, based on a small assemblage of sherds found in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is described as dubious by Vince (1984).

#### *Human remains*

The museum holds only an extremely limited collection of medieval and post-medieval human remains, from just a hand full of poorly dated chance finds. Both Medieval assemblages were discovered during landscaping work in the northeast of the county; the first, from Spittlefield, Marlborough, was buried in a stone coffin and may relate to a 14<sup>th</sup> century leper hospital on the same site (Annable 1965), the second is a group of at least five individuals buried 'without special care' in a trench in Ramsbury (Burchard 1966). The only other human remains probably dating to this period is a skull found by chance during construction work near the riverbank in Malmesbury Without, and lacking any contextual information.

### **Research into the collections since 2010:**

The research output generated by the Medieval and Post-Medieval collections since 2010 has been relatively minor, and has predominantly focused on individual objects: A 17<sup>th</sup> century trade token issued by Thomas Walford of Kingswood (prior to 1844 a detached part of Wiltshire) will soon be appearing in a catalogue of Gloucestershire tokens (Frith et al. *forthcoming*), a post-Medieval copper alloy Reißscheiben ingot was described as a parallel for a recent metal-detector find (Martinón-Torres et al. 2018) and a curb-bit from Ludgershall Castle has recently been described in greater detail by Clarke (2020). A detailed re-examination of the funerary achievement of Sir Thomas Long, acquired from Draycott Cerne Church, Sutton Benger, has greatly improved our understanding of the group's production and date, but also revealed that one is a rare and important survival of a 15<sup>th</sup> century Milanese armet, which is unlikely to have been part of the achievement (Dobson *in prep.*). The exception to this trend has been the recent sampling of Naish Hill Kiln ceramics for chemical analysis by Cotswold Archaeology in order to confirm or rule out the kilns as a source for a ceramic fabric identified on an archaeological site in Bristol (Gutierrez *pers. comm.*)

### **Priorities for future research:**

As the recent research by Clarke (2020) demonstrates, the small finds assemblages from Ludgershall, Huish, and elsewhere will be of interest for detailed studies of individual classes of artefact, however, such studies will often involve regional or national surveys and are beyond the scope of this project. Needless to say however, an improved online catalogue with detailed photographs of these small finds assemblages will doubtless improve awareness of these artefacts. The most obvious resource from the Medieval collections is the substantial and well stratified ceramic assemblage from Ludgershall Castle, complemented by assemblages from Huish, Membury and other, smaller, excavations. Together, with the ceramics from the Langley Burrell, Naish Hill and Minety Kilns, these assemblages cover the entirety of the medieval period, extending into the late-Saxon and post-Medieval periods, and thus provide an excellent opportunity to produce a Wiltshire Medieval fabric type series. Historic England currently provides funding for the creation of a similar type series in Somerset (SWHT 2021) and the museum should proactively encourage projects which may lead to the creation of such a resource, which would become a valuable resource for researchers and professional archaeologists alike, as well as firmly embedding the Museum's collections within regional archaeological research for the period.

A closely related potential avenue for research revolves around the large assemblages of decorated and undecorated tiles produced by the Naish Hill and Ludgershall excavations, supplemented by those from elsewhere in the county, such as those attributed to Langley Burrell, Stanley Abbey, Bradenstoke Priory and Malmesbury Abbey. Unspecified tests attempting to chemically link tiles from Naish Hill and Stanley Abbey reported in the initial publication were inconclusive (McCarthy *et al.* 1974), and in the context of the recent expansion in the availability and use of pXRF machines it may be profitable to return to this theme. In particular, a recent study of Romano-British ceramic building material in Devon has tentatively demonstrated the ability of 'broad-brush' pXRF-testing in combination with more traditional typological and limited thin-section analysis to differentiate between the products of contemporary kilns in close geographic proximity (Warry 2021). Testing with a pXRF machine is effectively non-destructive and can be used to rapidly test large quantities of material, and the techniques developed by Warry (2021) could conceivably contribute to a study of the distribution Naish Hill tiles, or, for instance, investigating how a stratified site such as Ludgershall was supplied over the course of its lifespan. However, there serious

limitations in the precision and suitability of pXRF for provenancing ceramics (Hunt and Speakman 2015), and whilst pXRF may be able to differentiate groups, more time-consuming conventional methods will still be needed to confirm attributions and provenances.

The other main opportunities for research within the collections are through arranging for the analysis and publication of otherwise unpublished assemblages: in particular Grimes' excavations at Membury, and the animal bone assemblage from Ludgershall. In addition to these two groups, the Langley Burrell kiln assemblage also requires detailed publication, although the detailed discussion of the site itself will rely on the discovery of site records or reports from the original excavation.

Wil Partridge  
05/2022