

**THE EXCAVATION OF A POST-MEDIEVAL MIDDEN
LOCATED DURING A WATCHING BRIEF
AT RIVERWAY INDUSTRIAL ESTATE NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT**

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A Post-Medieval kitchen midden associated with the clay tobacco pipe maker John Stephens, was investigated during the laying of a gas pipe on the former *Royal Brewery* site in Newport. The midden deposit exposed a wealth of archaeological material that can place the date of the midden at around the middle of the eighteenth century.

Location

The site is situated to the north of the market town of Newport, Isle of Wight, on the northern bank of the Lukely Brook, to the west of its confluence with the river Medina. This area of Newport is traditionally known locally as *Little London*. The site was utilised by the *Royal Brewery* of *W.B. Mew Langton & Co. Ltd.* More recently it was used as a distribution depot belonging to the modern *Whitbread* breweries.

Circumstances of the investigation

The midden was noted and investigated by the water during a watching brief instigated by the Isle of Wight County Council's Archaeological Unit during site preparations for a new *Curry's* department store. The watching brief had been made a condition of planning approval. The site was adjacent to that of the medieval Benedictine priory of St. Cross and was considered to be archaeologically sensitive. The midden was the only significant archaeological feature observed on the site. It had been exposed within the face of a trench being cut by *Southern Gas* in order to re-route a gas main around the site.

History of the site

The foundations of a mill associated with the 12th century Benedictine priory of St. Cross may still exist on the site. The present disused mill still lies to the south west of the development site. The construction site did not extend into this area. It was therefore not possible to determine whether medieval layers remained intact. The foundations of the main priory buildings, reused and converted in the Tudor period to a dwelling house lay beneath and to both sides of the disused railway viaduct to the north west of the site (Whitefield 1996).

In 1377 the priory and its mill were sacked and burned by the French during raids on the Island. This was the period when the three towns of Yarmouth, Newtown and Newport were exposed to French raids and subsequently burned (Jones 1988, 35). The earliest cartographic reference to the town plan of Newport dates from John Speed's map of 1611, and this depicts the later medieval streets with associated house plots and gardens (Tomalin & Scaife 1987, 69).

The plan shows the priory house standing in the area of Town Gate (Hunny Hill). A location which is surrounded by fields. To the east, in the area of the excavation the land use appears open and was possibly, used for pasture. Later 18th century maps confirm that the area was open as fields with no buildings or occupation present. However a substantial house can be seen on the large scale Ordnance Survey map from 1862. This house is accompanied by gardens and drive ways along with the St. Cross House. Both these houses were demolished in March 1888, when the Newport to Freshwater railway was built on a viaduct along the northern boundary of the present construction site.

This sector of Newport seems to have had a long association with brewing. In 1592, one Emmanuel Badd, who had supplied beer to the Island militia when the Spanish Armada was sighted in 1588 is recorded as having a house and brewery on the north side of nearby Sea Street (Newport Borough MSS. 45/2 ff 121-122). The area of land to the south of the Lukely Brook, immediately opposite the development site had been owned at least since the middle of the 16th century by the

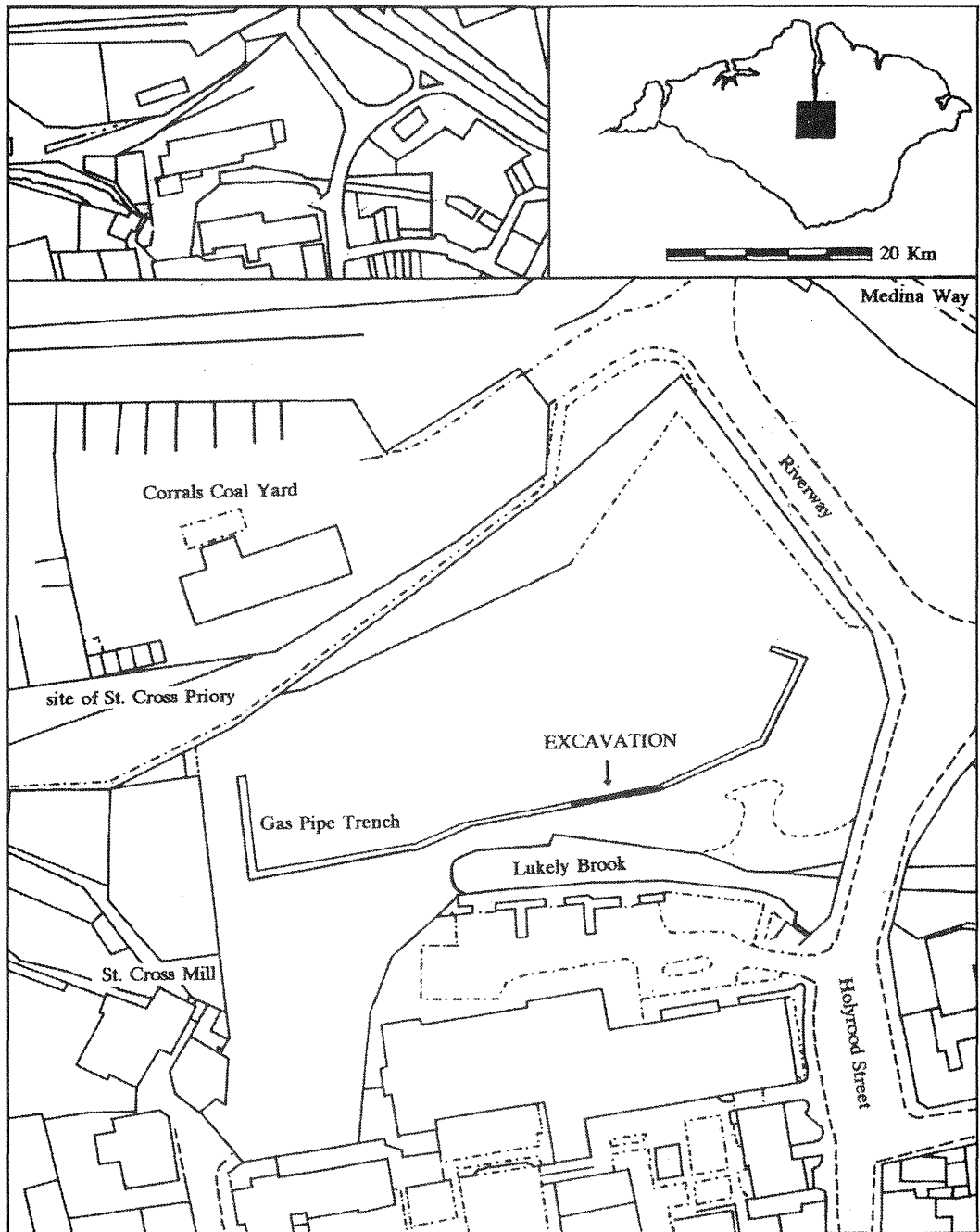


Fig: 1 The former Royal Brewery site. The location of the Post Medieval site.

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Mew family of Kingston, Isle of Wight. In the late 17th to early 18th century one of the tenants was a John Stephens who, in 1743, had a brew-house and malt-house on the site (IWCRO: ELD 79). John Stephens was also well known as a local clay tobacco pipe manufacturer. By the year 1814 it is believed that the brewing trade was operating out of this southern site through the Mew family in partnership with James Cull. The business clearly prospered and in 1873 Walter Langton joined into partnership with William B. Mew and Thomas P. Mew to form W.B. Mew Langton & Co. Further expansion meant that by 1908 the brewery site occupied both sides of the Lukely Brook.

In 1965 the company was taken over by *Strong & Co* of Romsey, Hampshire. The site was in turn bought out by the *Whitbread* breweries in 1968. Brewing on the site ceased in 1969 and the southern site was converted to a sheltered housing complex following a major fire in the late 1970's. The north-bank site, the subject of this paper, continued to be used by *Whitbread's* breweries as a distribution depot until 1994.

During the excavation of the trenches on the construction site, a large bottle dump containing complete and semi-complete bottles of the brewer Mew Langton was noted. Some bottles and ceramic vessels were complete with their contents and labels. A selection of vessels was then retained for a display for the social history collection of the Isle of Wight Museum Service.

The site and its investigation

A mechanical digger excavated a 156-m by 120-m trench to a 0.75-m depth for the installation of a gas pipe (fig 1). To the northwest, near to the medieval priory, the trench revealed no archaeological evidence other than a layer of industrial metalworking slag at a depth of 0.45m. As the trench continued southwards a few fragments of post-medieval pottery and oyster shells were observed at various levels. Around 68.5m from the west end of the trench a series of stratified layers were observed that continued for 18m. It is this area which is the subject of this report.

Attention was focused on the midden area, which seemed to have displayed the best stratified layers on the site. The 18m section was vertically trowelled on the southern face of the trench where artefacts were plotted according to contexts and levels. While the excavation and recording took place the trench was filled with a layer of sand, and the gas pipe was placed on this deposit. The work progressed with mechanical excavators digging random trial trenches across the site, to connect new pipes to the mains. This permitted further archaeological observations. An opportunity arose during the final recording to excavate a small sample trench across the base of the pipeline to establish the full depth of the midden and to determine the position of the natural bedrock.

The Context

The midden had been dug into a light olive brown silty clay (Context 17). This resembled the natural clay, which was present over the whole site. Flecks of tile and brick indicated that this clay had been previously disturbed. A small section (context 18) was excavated to reveal a light olive clay with coarse sand, pebbles, chalk and flint. This feature may have been the original gravel riverbed, indicating that the Lukely Brook was once considerably wider than it is today.

Context 15, a black sandy clay layer, continued across the section. Towards the east, the contexts became more complex with interruptions due to the dumping of building waste. One such layer (context 7) was composed of coarse sand with frequent fragments of slate. Another (context 3) was a coarse sandy light grey sand. This layer contained frequent lumps of bricks, limestone and chalk and was sealed by context 4, a pebble and chalk feature.

Context 13 a sandy dark grey to greyish brown clay and context 14 a very dark grey fine sand were layers which may have been associated with the midden site, in relation to a builder's dump associated with the demolition of a masonry structure. This dump could be tied into context 11 a medium sandy clay and context 8 a coarse sandy layer. Both of these contexts contained brick, chalk and mortar fragments. Context 16 a sandy silty clay also contained a deposit of 18th century pottery and glass, which was dumped into a hollow cut.

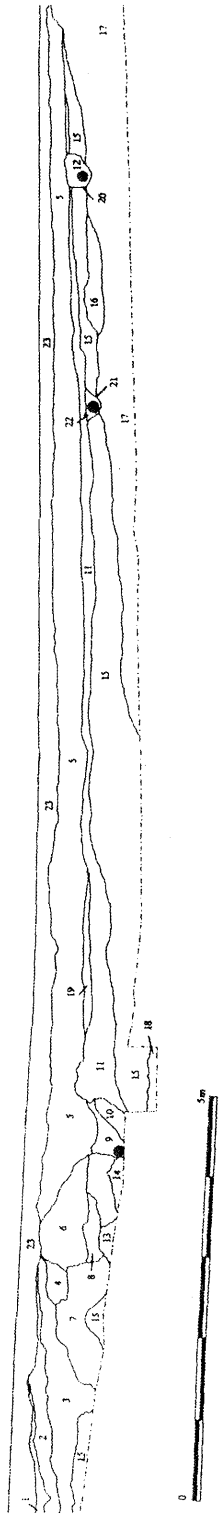


Fig: 2 Southern section of the Post-Medieval Midden

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Following the infill of context 15 a small land drain was found to be present which was cut into context 12, and found over cutting (context 20), a pebble clay soil. This context ran into context 15 but was sealed by context 11. Following the fill of context 11 a dump of ash was deposited above contexts (8, 7 and 11), within this ash layer a single rim sherd from a Verwood ware pan was found. This form can be dated to around 1750-1780.

The freshness of this sherd within the burnt ash deposit suggests that the rim sherd was intrusive in this layer. Possibly during this period a chalk lens was laid in a hollow of context 11 to level out the area. This may have been deposited before further digging began on the two land drains (context 12, cut 21). The next phase was the digging of a trench (cut 22) to lay a further land drain, (context 10). The fill of this feature was of coarse sand.

The second deposit of this phase was (context 9), a coarse sand which was followed by a major infilling lens represented by (context 5). This contained coarse coal fragments with flecks of slate. The fill may be associated with the nearby coal yard which first served the local railway network in the middle of the 19th century and continued in use till 1985. To the east of the site two other deposits were observed. Context 2 was a mixture of gravel and sands with flints and (context 1) fine topsoil. The final sealing layer was a cemented aggregate that covered the whole site.

The Finds

Ironworks

Twelve iron items were recovered from eleven contexts. The majority coming from contexts 15 and 16. The ironwork was badly corroded, but despite the wet conditions of the lower layers of the site, much of it was in a recognisable state. Six items resembling nails and four others from indeterminate fragments, were located. Two items worthy of note were located, a point of a knife blade and an iron handle from a trimming knife. The latter may have been associated with the production of clay tobacco pipes. Similar trimming knives have been found at the *Russell and Leigh* tobacco pipe manufactures in Portchester, Hampshire (Arnold 1974, 43-52. & Fox and Hall 1979).

Fig: 3

1. Iron nail. 18th century level (1052)
2. Iron nail. 18th century level (1054)
3. Iron nail. 18th century level (1055)
4. Iron knife. 18th century level (1056)
5. Iron trimming knife handle. 18th century level (1057)
6. Iron nail. 18th century level (1081)
7. Iron nail. 18th century level (1103)
8. Iron nail. 18th century level (1105)

The Glass

Forty-three fragments of glass were recovered from the excavation, seven came from the subsequent unstratified layers and the remainder from the midden layer of context 15.

Fig: 4

1. A decorated knob and stem fragment in clear glass from a drinking glass. 18th century layer (1058)
2. The kick from the base of a wine bottle in dark green glass. 18th century layer (1063)
3. A decorated body fragment (burnt) from a drinking vessel in clear glass. 18th century layer (1068)
4. A near complete example from a wine bottle in dark green glass, 1700-1720 (1070)
5. The folded foot-rim and stem from a drinking glass (burnt) in clear glass Early 18th century layer unstratified context (1151)

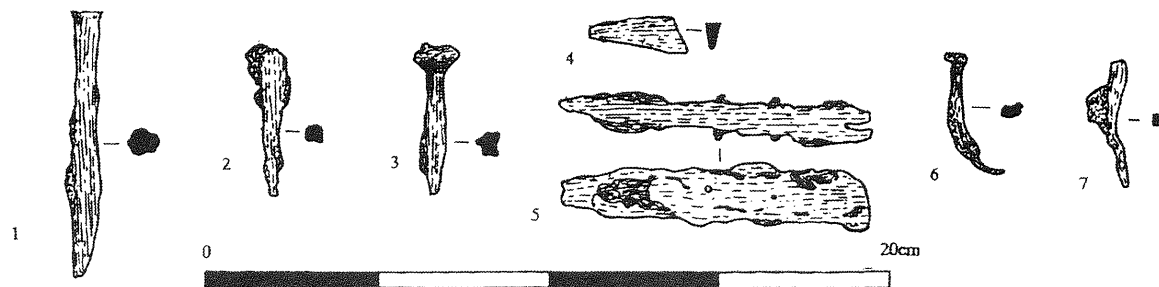


Fig: 3 Ironwork

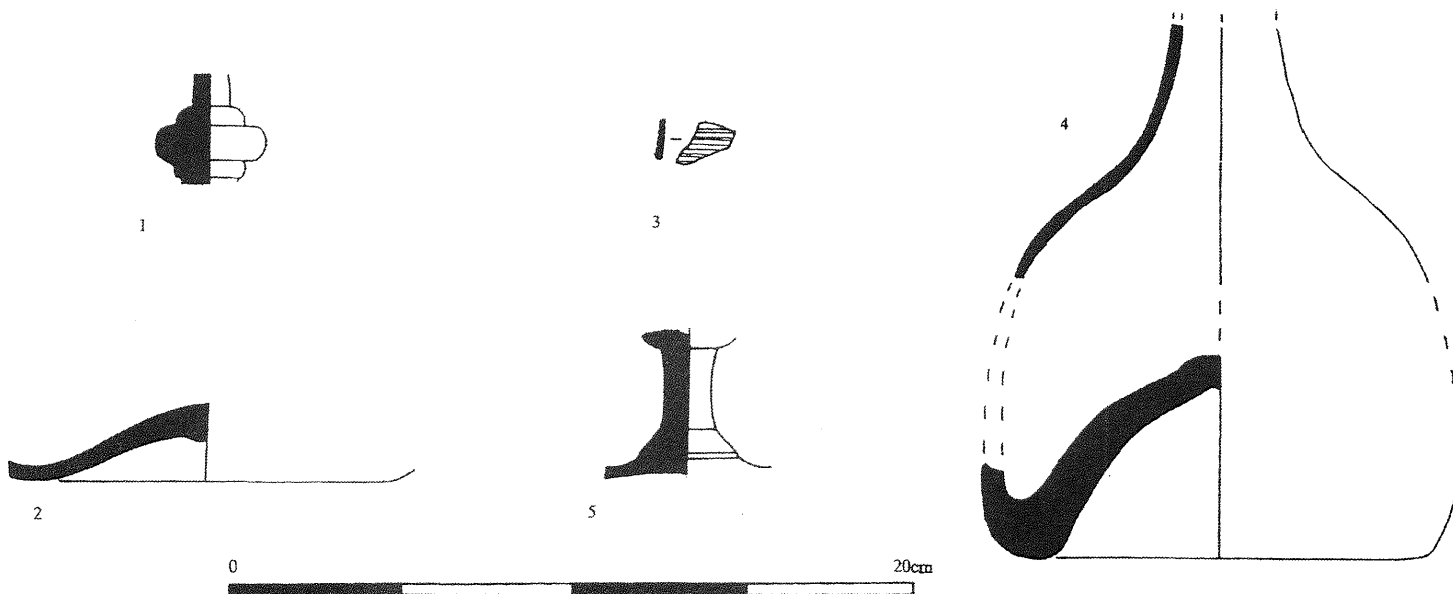


Fig: 4 Glass

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The Pottery

Sixty-five fragments of post-medieval pottery sherds were also recovered from the site. Five fragments came from the unstratified layers to the west of the midden. Six fragments also came from context 16, five fragments from context 7, and a single sherd from context 6, and the remainder of the pottery came from the midden (context 15).

The pottery was identified using an Island type series which came from a post-medieval building. Mr. Frank Basford collected this assemblage during pipe laying operations at Whippingham in 1993. Similar pottery was found in the excavations at Oyster Street in Portsmouth, Hants (Fox and Barton 1986) and from the excavations at Portchester Castle, Hants (Cunliffe 1994). The ceramics from the midden at the Curry's site could be dated to around 1700-1750 AD. Based on the fine table ware's and domestic course wares.

Fig: 5

(Context: 6. Date: 1750-1780)

1. Rim sherd in Verwood fabric (1002)

Fig: 5

(Context: 7. Date: Early 18th century)

2. Base sherd of a Tin glazed Delft-ware fabric with light blue and white decoration (1009)

Fig: 5

(Context: 15. Date: 1700-1750)

3. A near complete profile from a Tin glazed Delftware plate with light blue, brown and green decoration, flaky white mat-slip with cream core (1027 & 1028)
4. English white salt glazed cup from Staffordshire(1029)
5. Westerwald stone ware decorated vase with light blue decoration on a light grey fabric (1034)
6. Transfer printed vessel(1035)
7. Transfer printed fragment (1036)
8. Cane ware decorated vase (1037)
9. Reduced Red ware base to a large pan with internal green glaze (1043)
10. Rim sherd in London stone ware (1044)
11. Handle stump and body to a London stone ware tankard (1047)
12. Rim in Verwood ware with internal green glaze (1048)
13. Rim in Verwood ware with splashed green glaze (1049)
14. Burnt rim from a large Verwood ware pan (1051)
15. London stone ware tankard handle (1090)
16. Transfer printed bowl depicting a Chinese male under a tree in black decoration (1108)
17. Oxidised Red ware base from a large pan (1118)
18. London stone ware handle and body in dark brown glaze (1122)
19. Transfer printed bowl in cream ware with black decoration (1123)
20. Transfer printed vessel in a light blue Chinese decoration on a cream fabric (1124)

Fig: 5

(Context: 16. Date: 1750-1780)

21. Cream glaze plate rim (1130)
22. English blue salt glaze rim (1129)

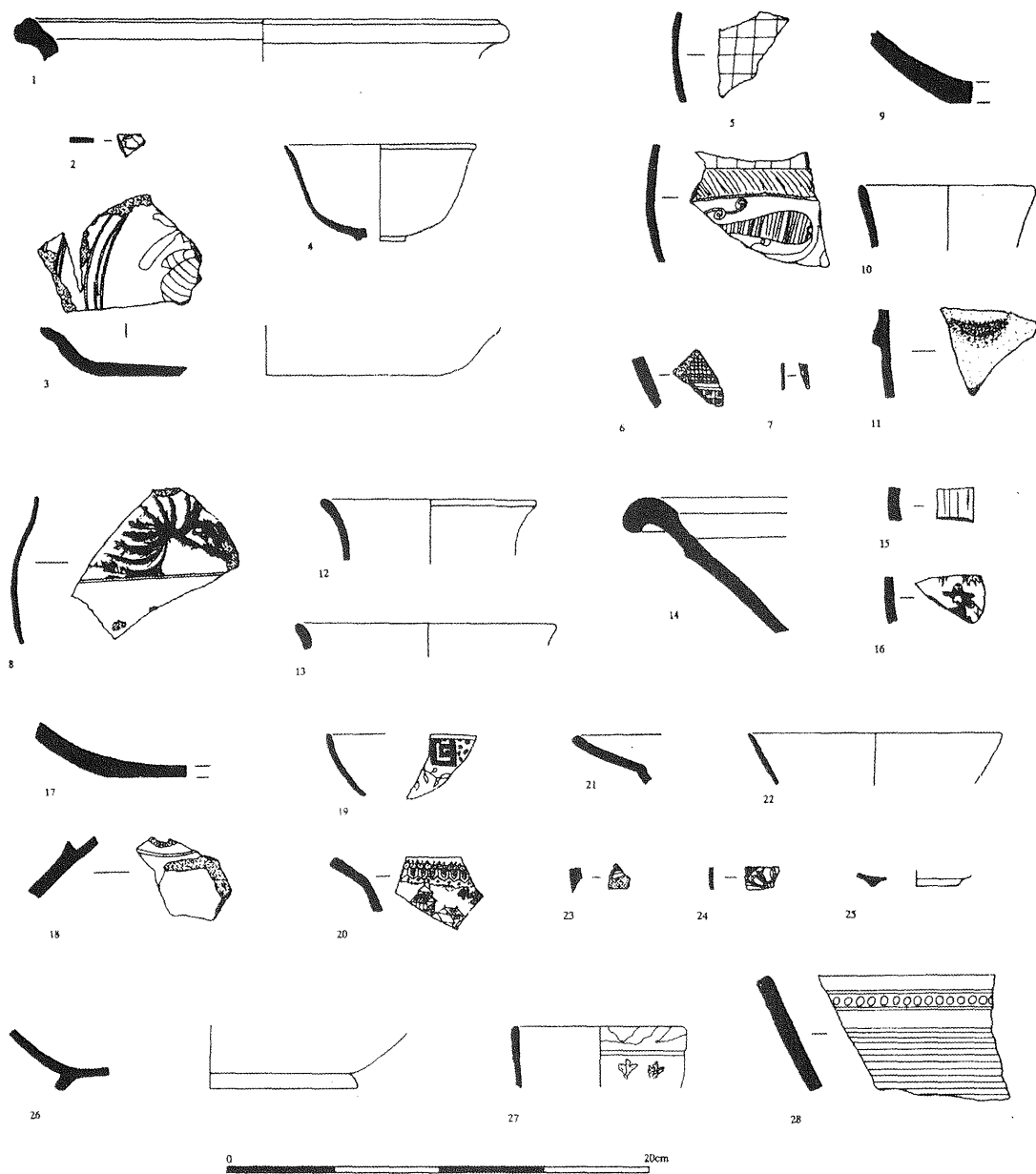


Fig: 5 Pottery

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- 23. Transfer printed fragment in light blue decoration (1131)
- 24. Transfer printed Pearl ware (1132)
- 26. Cream ware base of a bowl (1134)

Fig: 5

(Context: unstratified. Date: 1830-1870)

- 27. Brown and cream glaze cup (1146)
- 28. Cream and light blue decorated glazed bowl (1147)

The clay tobacco pipes

A total of 261 fragments of tobacco pipes were recovered from the site. Seven from context 7, and a single unstratified stem. The remainder came from the midden deposit (context 15). The midden contained 39 plain bowls, 3 Armorial pipes, 18 marked stems and 139 plain stem fragments. The marked stems were stamped with the name of the pipe maker. The majority of the *Curry's* site pipes were made by the possible nearby occupant John Stephens, who is recorded in the marriage licences as a bondsman working in Newport in 1708-1751. The only Island pipe manufacturer who is known to have exported his pipes to the colonies in Canada (Oswald 1975, 173).

Two further stems were recovered with the stamp 'R. Stephens' (Richard Stephens). It is known that in 1751 a John Stephens employed two apprentices according to the apprentice rolls (Oswald 1975, 173). The question could therefore be asked was 'R. Stephens' one of John Stephens apprentices.

Four remaining stems were also found to have the stamp of the pipe maker 'John Ally.' Again there is no record of this particular pipe maker. The nearest name that can be identified was a William Ally who was working in Winchester in 1730-1777. There is a suggestion that John Ally could have been the apprentice of William Ally.

The midden also contained three Armorial pipes with a spur design marked with 'I.A.' According to Atkinson & Oswald (1980. 363-391) the pipes were manufactured by John Andrews, who was working in Bristol in 1750-1780. The relief on the bowls depicts the Royal Coat of Arms of Hanover (1755-1785) 'Dieu et Mon Droit'.

Fig: 6

(Context: 15. Dated: 1700-1751)

- 1 - 14: Stamped pipes of John Stephens
- 15 - 16: Stamped pipes of Richard Stephens
- 17 - 20: Stamped pipes of John Ally
- 21 - 22: Armorial pipes
- 23 - 43: Plain pipe bowls

Faunal remains and butchery

A total of 36 animal bones were recovered from the midden deposit. Of these 32 could be assigned to species and type, the remainder were so fragmentary that it was impossible to say anything of value about them. Of the 36 bones only four displayed butchery marks. A single cattle humerus exhibited a cleaver cut with associated splitting of the shaft of the bone. This could be evidence of marrow extraction. Similar cleaver cuts could be detected on a single cattle ulna. This is characteristic of the separation of the ulna from the radius during portioning of the limb meat.

One cattle metacarpal showed signs of scoring by a cleaver, before the final chop split the proximal end of the bone from the shaft. An unidentified long bone fragment also had cleaver marks similar to the cattle metacarpal.

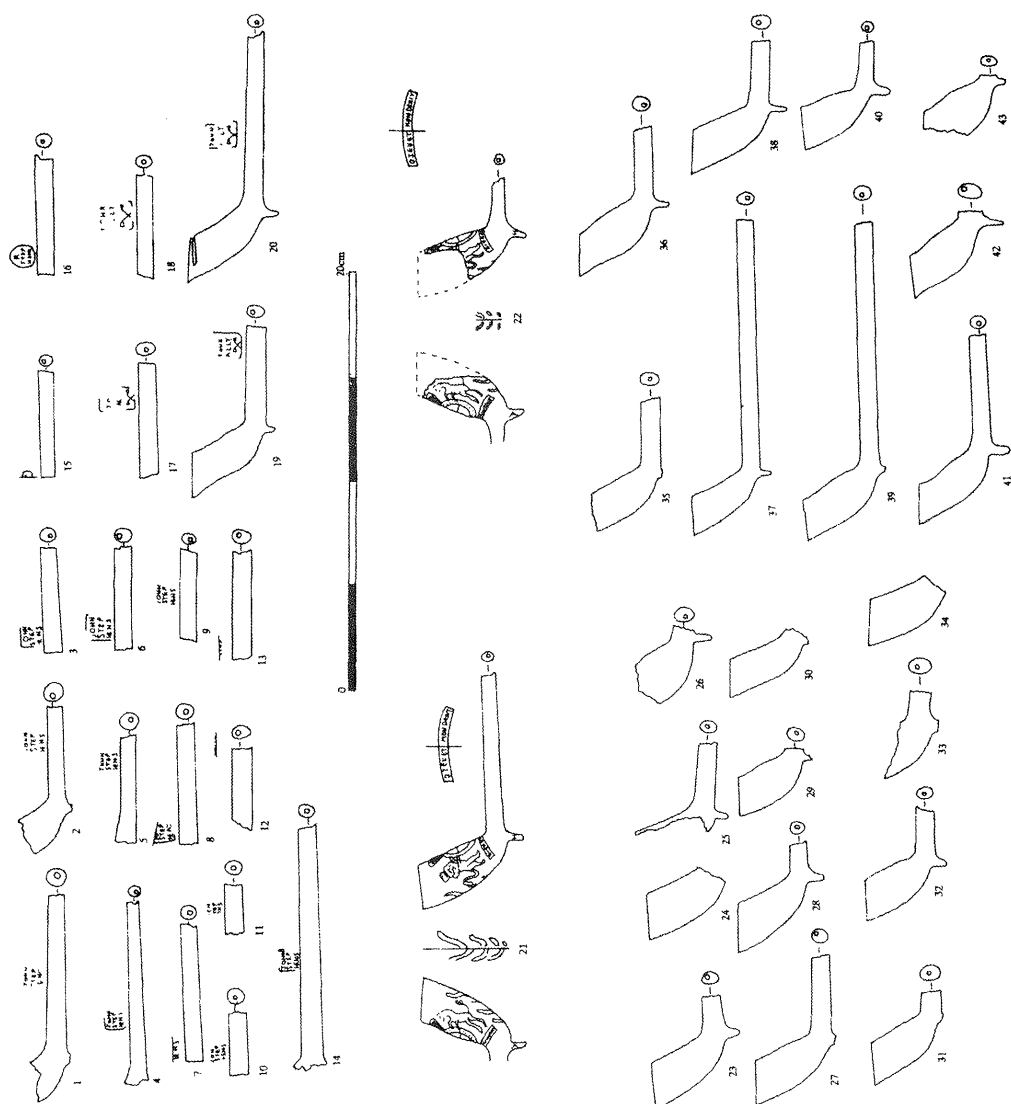


Fig: 6 Clay Tobacco Pipes

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Unfortunately the remainder of the bone assemblage displayed no obvious signs of butchery. Although the presence of a sheep skull, cattle mandibles and an atlas fragment, suggest that these animals were possibly brought to the nearby occupation area and slaughtered. This could be reinforced by the presence of less meat bearing bones of the lower cattle metacarpals.

Age Structure

A single lower left cattle mandible fragment had its third molar present; the eruption of this tooth is around the 4-5 year age group, which is a known 19th century trait. Today the tooth erupts at around 24-30 months (Silver 1969). Taking this 4-5 year age group, it would suggest that the cattle were used for their secondary uses as dairy cows, and for the rearing of calves.

Discussion

The faunal remains from the midden at Curry's have shown us that mature cattle over 5 years old were brought to the site and slaughtered. Likewise sheep, pigs, rabbits and domestic fowl. The sheep may have been utilised for its wool, before it was killed for its meat. The domestic fowls would have varied the diet alongside the consumption of wild rabbits.

It is interesting to note that the evidence for slaughtering the animals on the *Currys* site does not fit into the daily butchery practices which are documented locally. Newport was known to have had its own Butcher's Shambles situated to the northern side of St. Thomas's Square adjoining the High Street (Eldridge 1952, 60). The animals would have been driven into the town, slaughtered and dismembered before the joints of meat were sold to the customers. The midden produced quantities of lesser meat bearing bones not usually associated with prime cuts of meat. With this in mind, we could be detecting the waste from carcass preparation (Ryder 1984, 26-31) and the refuse associated with an area for slaughter within a possible outbuilding from a private dwelling.

The overall analysis of the faunal remains gives us an insight into animal husbandry in post-medieval Newport around 1750, but we need to study a larger assemblage of animal bones from this site and from around the Island to understand the butchery practices of post-medieval Wight.

The Marine Shells

A total of 48 edible winkles (*Littorina littorea*), 30 cockles (*Cerastoderma edule*), and a single chequered carpet shell (*Tapes decatus*) and 114 oysters (*Ostrea edulis*) were recovered from the midden. Two further oysters were found in context 16 and a further example was found to be unstratified.

The shape and size of the oysters indicated that they had been recovered from a cramped environment, possibly on the Solent banks or farther afield. Documented evidence in 1875 notes that the Medina Estuary was used as an oyster fishery (Eldridge 1952, 26). Medieval oyster beds are also documented in the 13th century situated at North Fairlee Luck and Claybrooks Luck, both within tributaries of the Medina river (Hockey 1970, 50).

The cockles and chequered carpet shell were collected from soft sandy sediment locations. This may include the north west coastline around Wootton Haven / Ryde Sands area. Roger Herbert of the Medina Valley Centre has noticed that the chequered carpet shell species was recently spotted in the estuarine silts of the Medina near Newport. The evidence may suggest that this species was also collected from such areas in 1750.

The presence of 48 large edible winkles found, all point to the harvesting of this species from rocky coastline locations, like Bembridge, Freshwater Bay or St. Catherines Point (Roger Herbert pers. comm). The overall marine shell assemblage from the midden, could point to the extraction of foodstuffs, both collected locally and further afield. It is possible that the shell food was purchased from either the local fishmonger in the Fish Shambles within the town, or straight from fishermen on the local quayside. It is unfortunate that no fish bones were recovered from the midden, even though sieving was carried out on the samples of soil, however a small slice taken from the midden within the pipe trench does not rule out the presence of fish bones.

Building Materials

The few fragments of building material found within the midden could derive from a masonry structure within the vicinity. Both brick fragments with mortar adhering and peg tiles were recovered, these were found in association with Welsh slate fragments. The few fragments found do not provide us with a meaningful picture, but we can assume that some form of building work was taking place when the midden was open in the mid 18th century.

Prehistoric and Roman Activity

Within the post-medieval midden two Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age flint waste flakes were found. Both flakes displayed the characteristic striking platforms and traces of their cortex were visible. Three sherds of Early Roman pottery were also obtained from the midden. These comprise of a single fragment of briquetage probably from a vessel associated with the evaporation of salt, and two sherd's from a single 1st century AD. imported white ware vessel (Malcolm Lyne pers. comm).

It seems unreasonable to consider that this material was direct evidence of prehistoric or Roman activity as the finds came from the fill of an 18th century midden. As the remainder of the trench did not yield any occupation evidence, we must assume that the flints and pottery found their way into the midden from elsewhere, from outside the trench area. Evidence of Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age activity has been recorded nearby on the banks of the Medina Estuary. Roman occupation material was found under the goods yard of the old railway (PRN: 472), in Hunny Hill (PRN: 1878) and also under the Corrals Coal Yard (PRN: 2437) and around the Quay at Newport (PRN: 861).

Implications and Conclusions

The initial investigation of the site was to see if any medieval evidence survived from the priory of St. Cross or its lands. Unfortunately medieval occupation was sadly absent. The discovery of a sealed 18th century midden associated with a well documented clay pipe manufacturer, will help us date the sporadic post-medieval finds and layers found within construction trenches in and around Newport.

Taking into account the assemblage of pottery and dateable clay pipes from the midden, we can now tell that the midden began around the middle of the 18th century, and may have been subject to sporadic filling until the middle of the 18th century.

The site has a complex history following the accruing of the midden. It is interesting that this assemblage contained some evidence for burning, suggesting either biodegradable material was burnt, or that the remains of a nearby stoking-pit associated with a tobacco pipe kiln had been conveniently emptied.

It is also noteworthy that a few fragments of metalworking slag were obtained from the site, with deposits of coal and charcoal, this would suggest that some form of metal working was taking place in the area.

The ceramics include a high number of tablewares, this assemblage compared with other post-medieval sites from Newport is unusual. There may have been a simpler explanation but we must await further detailed analysis of other midden deposits before we can answer this bias.

The coarse ware vessels consist of drinking mugs and cups from the kilns in Staffordshire, Nottingham and London. The serving plates also come from the kilns of London and Staffordshire, and the two vases are products from Staffordshire and Germany. The glass vessels found comprise of wine bottles and drinking vessels. Associated with the tableware was knife blade and food debris from marine shells and animal bones. The modest collection of clay tobacco pipes stresses a lot of breakage's for such a small time scale. We are left to consider that if we are dealing with a standard kitchen midden, or the refuse from a clay tobacco pipe kiln, even though no wasters are evident. The deposition of the pipes could also be linked to a drinking establishment.

The question is problematic as both documents and maps do not indicate any occupation around 1750. The overall assemblage points towards a masonry structure in the area either in the demolition phase or renovation phase. The domestic finds points to refuse not from a poor occupant, but neither

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from a wealthy household. It is possible that the midden was associated with the clay tobacco pipe manufacturer John Stephens.

John Stephens is recorded in 1743 as owning a brew house and a malt house in Crocker Street, this establishment would have backed onto the Lukely Brook opposite the site described in this report. The marriage licence's also recorded that John Stephens was a recognised tobacco pipe maker. With this evidence we could conclude that John Stephens had a pipe kiln in the vicinity, and a brew and malt house on the site of Crocker Street. The midden would have served both as a rubbish pit for the general household waste and for the rubbish from the other activities on the site.

The collection from the *Currys* site is of great value for dating further finds in Newport and within the surrounding area. We know that the midden material began to be deposited around AD. 1700 and that it steadily accumulated until the last vessel was discarded around AD. 1750. The use of the site then becomes uncertain when the 1862 map shows a house standing in this area. After this time drainage pipes are laid and subsequently at the turn of this century the Royal brewery was established.

Acknowledgements

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