

Small Finds Assessment, Minchery Paddock, Littlemore, Oxford (MP12)

Introduction

A total of 51 objects recovered from excavations at Minchery Paddock, Littlemore, Oxford (MP12) were submitted for dating and assessment. The majority of the finds were from well stratified contexts with good location detail while a small number were identified during finds washing. The majority of the finds date to the medieval period, many specifically to the 13th and 14th century however a number of finds date to the post-medieval or modern period. The finds included a number of decorated floor tile fragments, clay pipe and two coins and personal items such as tweezers, buttons and pins. A bone tuning peg, probably for a psalter, may be a product of a workshop in St Aldates, Oxford. All finds span the medieval to modern periods and are summarised by trench in the paragraphs below and detailed in the tables provided.

Trench 1

Find no.	Context number	Object type	Condition	Count	Weight gms	Dating	Comments
1a	TP1 spit3	Pin	Complete	1	0.2	1300-1600	Dress or 'shroud' pin, applied wire head. Med - PM
1b	TP1 spit3	Pipe bowl	Fragment	1	2	1650 - c.1800	Marker's initials (unidentified) moulded on stem (later 17th C innovation)
1c	TP1 spit3	Button	Complete	1	0.2	1550+	Lathe turned bone button; lathe turned decoration of circumferential lines visible under eyeglass
1d	TP1 spit3	Unidentified	Fragment	1	5.9	Med - PM	Copper alloy fragment with multiple lines cast into it
105	1003	Pipe bowl	Incomplete	1	19.4	1700-1770	Undecorated pipe bowl with length of stem

Of the five small finds recovered from Trench 1, only the clay pipe bowls (1b and 105) were closely datable to c. AD 1650-1800. The other objects are all likely to be of post-medieval date apart from a thin dress or 'shroud' pin, the use of which was popular during the high medieval to early post-medieval period. It is likely that disturbance this layer during the post-medieval period has resulted in the pin being residual.

Trench 2

Find no.	Context number	Object type	Condition	Count	Weight gms	Dating	Comments
14	2001	Lead pipe	Incomplete	1	-	Late PM / Mod	Lead pipe; late 18th to 19th century.
47	2005	Decorated tile	Incomplete	1	121	1270-1380	Griffin facing left (c.f. Emden 1969:41, no 19)
125	2005	Decorated tile	Incomplete	1	103.4	1270-1380	Studded circle design (see Emden 1969:37, no 5).
81	2009	Silver coin	Incomplete	1	0.6	1180-1189	Short cross of Henry II; moneyer Osber, unknown mint

52	2012	Stone	Uncertain	1	191	Unknown	Cobble? Uncertain date or use
59	2017	Buckle plate	Incomplete, fragile	3	1.1	1250-1400	Probable buckle plate for a small buckle, leather surviving
137	2034	Toggle	Complete	1	6	Med	Pig metatarsal
141	2036	Pin	Incomplete	1	0.4	Post-Med	Dress or brooch pin of later medieval to post medieval date, c. 1400-1700.
85	2044	Silver coin	Complete, tarnished, corroded	1	1.5	1247-1279	Voided long cross, probably of Henry III Reverse too worn for mint/moneyer
87	2045	Unidentified	Incomplete	1	0.4	Med-Mod	Unidentified copper alloy fragment
111	2045	Spindle whorl	Complete	1	5.2	1200-1500	Probable spindle whorl: size of hole suggests this ID rather than a bead
114	2047	Tweezers	Complete	1	4.5	1270-1400	Tweezers with ear-scoop terminal, patterning to seam (to aid joining)
138	2052	Tuning peg	Complete	1	1.9	14-15th C	Bone tuning peg for an instrument

This trench contained a mixture of artefacts that, with one exception (find 14), can all be dated to the medieval period, with the majority falling into the c. 1200-1400 bracket. The artefacts consisted of those associated with general personal use, including dress accessories (SFs 59, 137, 141) and personal grooming (114). A possible spindle whorl was recovered (SF 111), as was a bone tuning peg for a stringed instrument (SF 138). The tuning peg, of Lawson's Type B, probably dates from the 14th to 15th century. The hole for the string is at the head end of the peg, a feature which suggests the instrument in question is a psaltery (Egan 1998: 286). The tuning peg's handle is polished through use. Several other examples were found in a 15th century context at St Aldates, Oxford (Durham 1977:163-164), the evidence from which suggests an instrument-making workshop that included the production of tuning pegs (*ibid.* 165-166).

Two fragments of decorated two-colour floor tile from context 2005 (SF 47 & 125) were identified. Both these examples, and all the others recovered from the site, are known as 'stamped Wessex' tiles due to the techniques of manufacture, design styles and the presence of keying holes in the base (Emden 1969). SF 47 depicts a griffin while SF 125 depicts part of a studded circle; both tiles can be paralleled with examples uncovered at St Peter in the East, Oxford, and also to tiles found in Osney Abbey and Littlemore Church (Emden 1969, figs 13 and 11 respectively). The tiles at St Peter in the East were laid c. AD 1330 (*ibid* 32), however this style was in production from the later 13th century well into the 14th century (see Eames 1985:54-55).

The only coins discovered on site were from Trench Two. A silver short-cross penny of Henry II (AD 1180-1189, SF 81) is the earliest datable artefact from the site. The coin is incomplete, being broken rather than cut down to a smaller denomination. The moneyer is Osber, but the part of the coin with the mint name is now missing. The second coin (SF 85) is complete but is in poor condition; it is only identifiable as a 'voided' long cross penny which were issued AD 1247-1279. The vast majority of these coins were issued by Henry III (AD 1216-1272) however some were issued by Edward I until AD 1279. The coins come from different contexts; SF 81 came from a

demolition layer (2009) while the voided long cross penny came from a levelling layer (2044), therefore it is likely that both of these are intrusive into these contexts.

Trench 3

Find no.	Context number	Object type	Condition	Count	Weight gms	Dating	Comments
27	3000	Pipe bowl	Incomplete	1	17.4	1610-1680	Pipe bowl with part of stem
34	3001	Pipe bowl	Incomplete	1	14.9	1700-1900	Undecorated pipe bowl
72	3003	Spoon	Incomplete	1	13.7	c.1880-1936	William Page & Co (Founded c.1890). Electro-plated. Birmingham.
140	3004	Pin	Complete	1	0.4	1300-1600	Dress or 'shroud' pin, drawn wire shaft with a wound-wire head.
126	3010	Decorated tile	Fragment	1	74.1	1270-1380	Similar design dated to c. second quarter of 14th C
45	3011	Pipe stems	Fragments	4	17.8	pre 1750	larger stem and bore suggests earlier date
45	3011	Pipe bowl	Incomplete	1	14.6	1650-1680	Pipe bowl with part of stem
32	3015	Unidentified	Fragment	1	24.2	1200-1500	Possibly a fragment of limestone tile? Alternatively could be a weight (loom?)
38	3015	Window came	Good	1	23.9	c.1200s +	Retaining quarter of a window came, with green glass. Later 13th C for domestic dwellings, slightly earlier for ecclesiastical
129	3015	bell	Fair	1	6.4	1500-1800	Gilded pewter bell fragment, rim chart = 6cm diameter
95	3017	Decorated tile	Incomplete	1	115.8	1270-1380	Studded circle design (probably same as Emden 1969 no 5).
96	3017	Decorated tile	Fragment	1	47.9	1270-1380	Unidentified pattern, fabric as majority (red with grey core)
98	3017	Decorated tile	Fragment	1	25.3	1270-1380	See Salisbury Museum Medieval Catalogue Part 1 p136 fig 42 no 194
124	3017	Decorated tile	Fragment	1	60.8	1270-1380	Probably Emden 1696 no. 20
127	3017	Decorated tile	Fragment	1	18.2	1270-1380	Unidentified pattern - 'stabbed wessex' - grey tile

130	3017	Decorated tile	Incomplete	1	61.9	1270-1380	Scrolled fleuretty designs - no direct parallel in available literature
120	3020	Wall tile	Fragment	1	26.8	Med	Green glazed wall tile fragment?
69	3022	Unidentified	Fair	1	1	Med-Mod	Possibly a button or fixing with back-plate.
91	3022	Vessel	Incomplete	1	152.2	1175-1400	Brill / Boarstall ware bottle
73	3023	Decorated tile	Incomplete	1	129.7	1270-1380	Griffin facing left (blundered beak)
119	3023	Decorated tile	Fragment	1	61.2	1270-1380	Unidentified pattern - 'stabbed Wessex' - grey tile
131	3023	Decorated tile	Fragment	1	38.8	1270-1380	Unidentified pattern - 'stabbed Wessex'
104	3040	Button	Fair	1	7.6	c. 17th C	Tombac' button

Trench 3 yielded the greatest number of finds and also covered the greatest date range spanning the high medieval period through to the 18th and 19th centuries AD. The top layers of soil (3000, 3001, 3003, 3011) produced exclusively post-medieval finds from 17th and 18th century clay pipe stems and bowls to a late 19th or even early 20th century spoon (SF 72 context 3003). However beneath these layers the finds return to the prevalent date of the 13th and 14th centuries. Ten fragments of decorated two-colour floor tiles were recovered from three contexts (3010, 3017 and 3023). Although all the tiles can be described as 'stabbed Wessex' types, some of the smaller examples are too fragmentary to equate the designs with documented patterns. The example from context 3010, described as a modern feature, may depict a fleur-de-lys-in-border design, not directly paralleled but similar to Eames 1985 figure 75, which is dated to the second quarter of 14th century. Six tile fragments were recovered from context 3017 and most if not all appear to bear individually distinct designs. One tile with a studded circle pattern (SF 95) is paralleled in Trench Two by SF 125. Another tile (SF 124) could be paralleled with tiles from St Peter in the East (probably Emden 1969:42 no. 20) and is also seen at Dorchester Abbey, Godstow Abbey and King Edward Street, Oxford (*ibid.*). SF 98 could not be paralleled to those tiles illustrated in Emden however an example uncovered from the Old Deanery, Salisbury is likely to be a close contender (Saunders 1991:136 fig 42 no 194). One small sherd of glazed green tile (SF 120) may be a wall tile of later medieval date.

A Brill/Boarstall ware bottle (SF 91) was found in a context interpreted as the remains of a floor surface. The vessel dates from the c. 13th-15th century and was probably used as a container for oils and sauces (Mellor *et al.* 1994:118). Similar vessels have been found at Rewley Abbey, Oxford (*ibid.*).

A retaining quarter of a lead alloy window came with intact green glass was recovered from context 3015, the fill of a demolition pit. Lead window comes were first used in wealthy homes and ecclesiastical buildings, being introduced in domestic dwellings in the late 13th century (Egan 1998:51).

Discussion

The majority of the small finds recovered from Minchery Paddock date to the medieval period, with a predominance of objects dating from the 13th to 14th century.

However Trench One contains finds dating almost exclusively to the post-medieval period which suggests activity in this area was more intensive than in the medieval period; a medieval or early post-medieval dress pin is likely to be residual although it does attest to some activity of this date in the vicinity. Conversely Trench Two contains finds almost exclusively of medieval date, predominantly dating to the 13th and 14th centuries. The nature of the finds suggests a domestic area, possibly personal space such as private quarters. Trench Three contains little in the way of personal or domestic items however the finds do suggest the presence of a high-status building, with tiled floors and glazed windows which was demolished and the rubble used for levelling. Although floor tiles with identical patterning to the Minchery Paddock tiles were recovered from St Peter's in the East, Oxford and are dated to the c. AD 1330s, similarity in design does not conclude origin (Emden 1969:32). However the direct parallels between some of the tiles suggest that they date to about the same period and are likely to have come from the same workshop. A conservative date range of c. AD 1270 – 1330 is offered for the laying of the Minchery Paddock tiles. The assemblage should be retained for future study and further dating of the ceramics should be sought from an appropriate specialist. One item (SF 59) from Trench Two contains leather and should be conserved. The Henry III coin is in poor condition but conservation may aid survival.

Anni Byard June 2013

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