

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN PETERSFIELD, 1992

By LEIGH J TORRANCE and STEVE FORD

with a contribution by JANE TIMBY

ABSTRACT

This report describes an evaluation and watching brief behind the High Street in Petersfield town centre. Few archaeological deposits were observed of medieval date but a useful corpus of medieval pottery was recovered.

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 1990 Thames Valley Archaeological Services carried out an evaluation on behalf of Prudential Assurance as a part of their planning application to redevelop an area of the town centre. This took place according to specifications approved by the County Archaeologist, Hampshire County Council Planning Department.

The evaluation (Ford 1990) revealed only a small number of archaeologically significant deposits. After consultation with the County Archaeological Officer, it was decided that the most appropriate follow-up action was a watching brief. This required a field officer to be present during the course of the initial ground works, once construction had started. The intention was to excavate and record, as fully as possible, any exposed archaeological deposits without causing undue delay to the construction programme. The work was undertaken during July 1992.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The present settlement of Petersfield has developed from a new town laid out in the late 12th century (Hughes 1976, 112; Anon 1984). It occupies a position on heathland adjacent to the main London to Portsmouth highway (A3), a location from which the town probably derives its past prosperity. As a consequence, it was the site of many coaching inns in later periods.

A previous archaeological investigation of the town took place at a site in Sheep Street (Fox and Hughes, 1993) where evidence for Roman and medieval occupation was recovered. It was suggested that two or three properties, possibly belonging to wealthy owners, were present in the 13th and 14th centuries. Part of the site may have been used as an inn at this time as in the 16th century the Ship Inn is referred to in documentary sources. A small number of chance finds of prehistoric and Roman material are recorded from other parts of the town and a well at number 26 The Spain may be of medieval date (Hughes 1976, 110).

RESULTS – EVALUATION TRENCHES

Prehistoric

Ten undiagnostic struck flints, including two cores, were recovered from the various evaluation trenches. (Details are presented in the site archive.)

Medieval

Despite the necessarily limited nature of a town-centre evaluation, the vast majority of the significant archaeological deposits were dated to this period.

In Trench G the terminal of a flat-bottomed ditch (F9 Fig 2) was found which contained a small number of 13–15th century pottery sherds. Similarly, Trench H contained two small gullies (F14, F15, Figs 2, 3) which produced five sherds of 13th–15th century pottery (F14) and one pottery sherd of 15th century or later date (F15).

Trench F revealed the most interesting and securely dated features from the evaluation. F19 and F20 were a hearth and ash pit respectively.

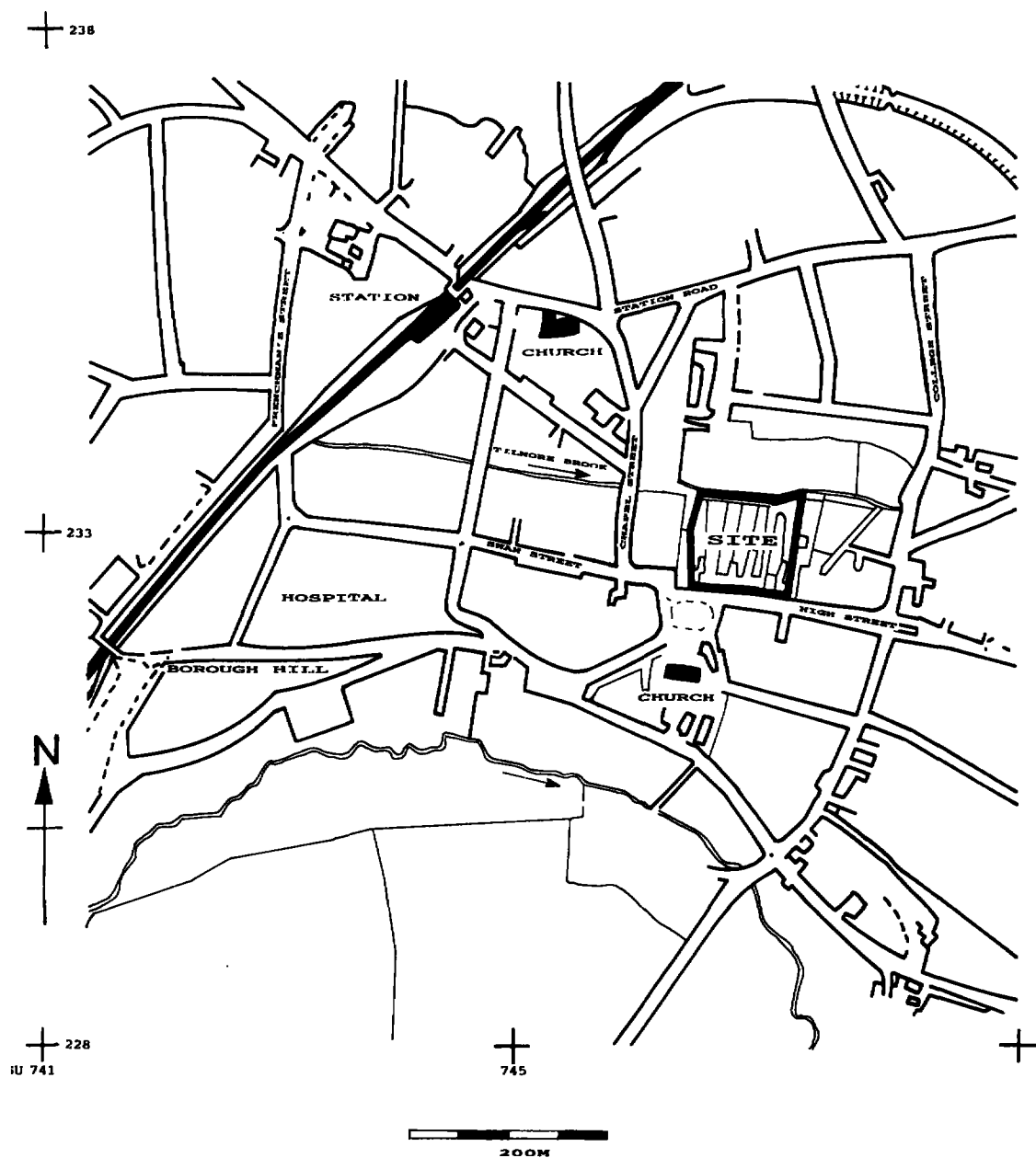


Fig 1. Location of site within Petersfield.

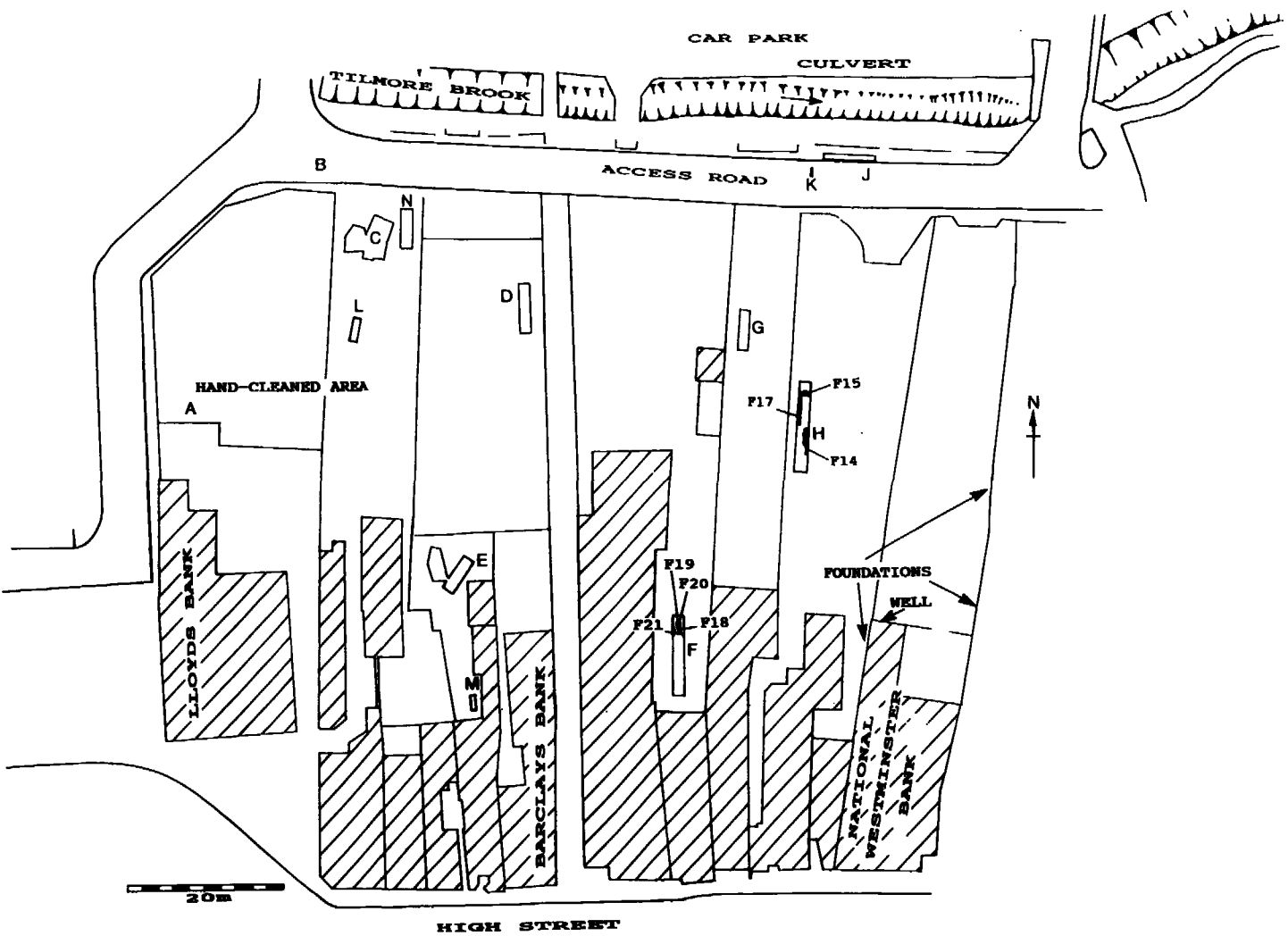


Fig 2. Location of evaluation trenches and watching brief observations on a plan showing buildings existing prior to the 1992 redevelopment.

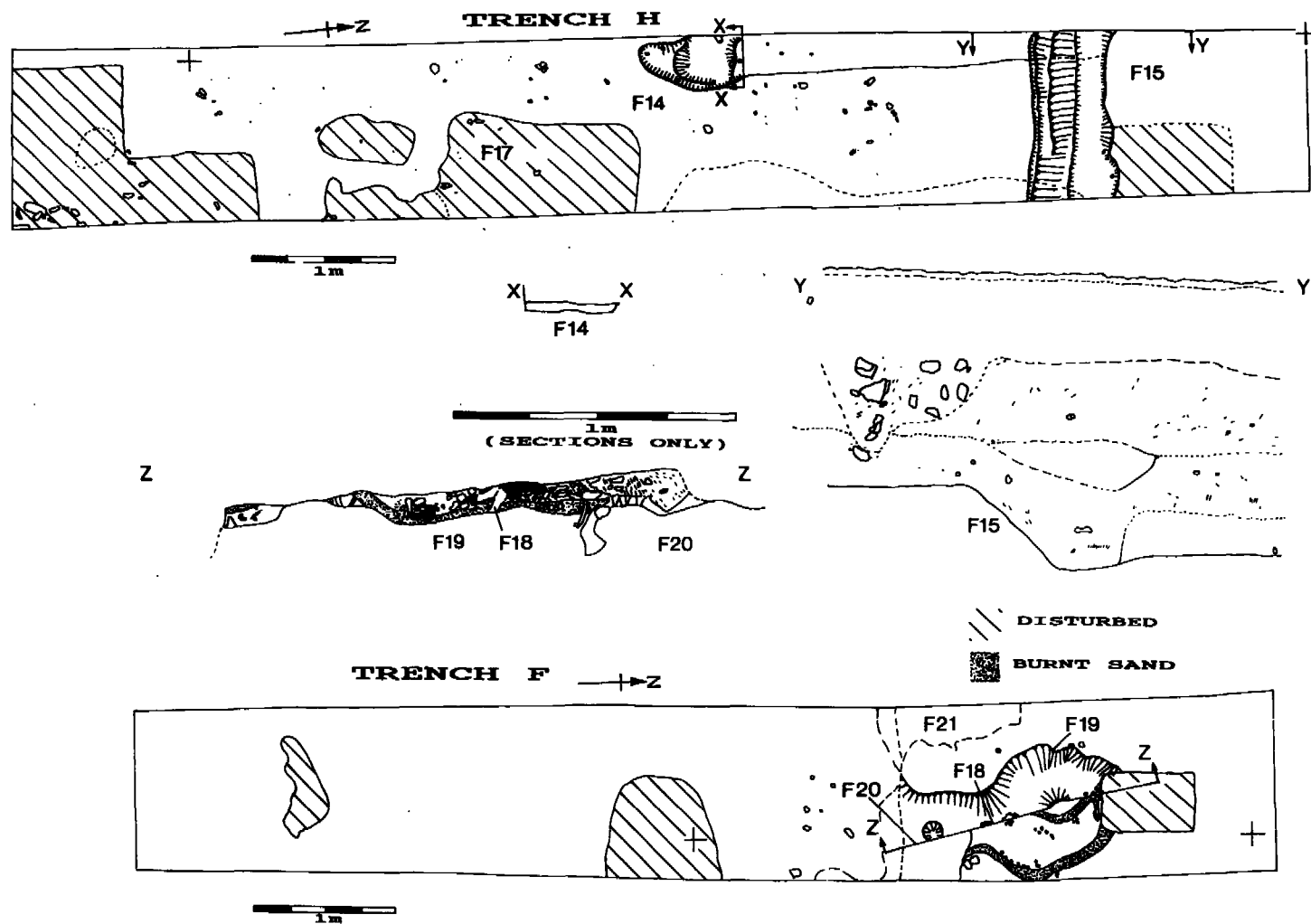


Fig 3. Plans of evaluation trenches F and H.

F19 (Fig 3) was a shallow scoop, V-shaped in plan, with a distinctly fire-reddened base. F20 was another shallow scoop, partly overlying F19, filled with comminuted charcoal and wood ash (?). Several surface finds of 12th–14th century pottery were recovered, and features F19 and F20 produced many sherds of 12th–13th century pottery and pieces of daub. The best finds from these features were several large, conjoining pieces from a ?late 12th–mid 13th century pitcher (Fig 4, 1). F18, also in this trench, may be a stake hole cut into F19 but is more likely to be a root or burrow.

A number of 18th–19th century features were found in Trench D, the excavation of which led to the discovery of a pit/gully (F6, Fig 2) containing many greensand lumps and one sherd of 13th–14th century pot. A second, similar feature (F7, Fig 2) was also found nearby.

Finally, Trench M was a small hand dug trench in which were found two, possibly three features. F22 was a large 16th–17th century pit which cut a smaller pit/post hole (F24) containing greensand lumps. These features both cut another feature or layer (F23) which produced 13th–late 14th century sherds.

RESULTS – WATCHING BRIEF

The watching brief made few new discoveries and confirmed the suggestion of the evaluation results, that few deposits of significant archaeological interest exist to be threatened by the redevelopment.

The ground work required for the foundations of the new development mainly consisted of topsoil removal followed by the digging of 3 × 3 m holes to take concrete bases and connecting trenches (c 0.60 m wide, 1 m deep). The depth of the bases was usually about 3 m below the top of the subsoil.

Following the initial site clearance, an area to the west of the site, north of Lloyds Bank ('hand-cleaned area', Fig 2), contained a relatively cleanly exposed subsoil surface. Several features cutting the subsoil were visible, including the base of a cess pit and a number of linear features running roughly at right angles to the High

Street. It was thought these might be plot boundaries. A few sherds of medieval pottery were also recovered from this level and so the area was examined in detail. When the features were excavated all proved to be shallow (c 0.15 m) and contained post-medieval pottery and building debris. In one instance it was possible to see a section of one of the linear features in a baulk which had been left below an existing wall. From this section it was clear that at least one of the features, seen in plan, was the remains of a larger feature cut from just below the original modern ground surface, through layers which contained fairly recent material.

Within the redevelopment area generally, the typical stratigraphy comprised up to 1 m of post-medieval layers overlying the subsoil. All of the features observed during the groundwork were cut from, or from above, this layer. One ditch, for example, contained several sherds of medieval pottery along with post-medieval pottery and brick. Very few sherds of medieval pottery were found on the site in general.

On the eastern edge of the development, the remains of the foundations of a post-medieval building were revealed which was almost certainly associated with a well.

Appearing at first as a void in the corner of one of the base holes, the well was capped with a hexagonal course of bricks. Below this, two barrels, one on top of the other, had rotted away but the steel bands from them were still in place with the void respecting the shape of the barrels.

The upper part of the well was filled with post-medieval (probably Victorian) debris. Unfortunately it was not possible to excavate this feature and its original date is not known. The lower fills, though, were not disturbed by the new foundations and are preserved in-situ.

THE POTTERY by Jane R Timby

The evaluation trenches C to H, J and L–N collectively yielded a moderately small but significant assemblage of pottery dating from the late 12th century through to the post-medieval period. In total this amounted to some 4.5 kg in weight.

The pottery was sorted into fabric types for each trench and an approximate date assessment was made for each recorded group. A brief description of the fabrics and associated forms where identifiable is given below. In addition to the pottery a small amount of ceramic roofing tile and some daub with wattle impressions were present.

Summary of fabrics and forms

Medieval

TF1. Very hard, fairly coarse, granular ware. The paste, orange-red in colour, contains an abundant density of moderately fine, well-sorted, rounded quartz (less than 0.5 mm), sparse mica and occasional white calcareous inclusions. The external surfaces are covered in a yellowish-white slip. Forms: Handled tripod pitcher, cooking pots.

TF2. Finely micaceous grey or orange ware with a sparse to moderate scatter of fine, macroscopically visible grains of quartz. Includes both glazed and unglazed vessels. Forms: Unglazed cooking pots and glazed, decorated jugs/pitchers. The latter are decorated with slip and/or incised wavy lines below the glaze and, in one example, with applied stamp(s).

TF3. Hard, dense sandy version of TF2. Common to abundant density of well-sorted, rounded quartz. Forms: Includes both glazed and unglazed vessels. The latter include scratch-marked sherds from cooking vessels. Glazed wares include jugs/pitchers.

TF4. Dense granular, grey-brown ware with sparse mica. Form: Unglazed handmade cooking pot.

TF7. Coarser version of TF3. Sparse ill-sorted large dark-coloured grains of quartz sand up to 2 mm in size with sparse inclusions of chalk or voids of similar size. Finely micaceous clay matrix. Forms: Handmade, unglazed cooking pots including some with scratch-marked surfaces.

TF9. Dense sandy, hard, black ware. Common to abundant density of rounded quartz. Forms: Unglazed handmade cooking vessels.

TF10. Hard, fine sandy orange or grey fabric with sparse red iron. Forms: Unglazed cooking pots and glazed jugs/pitchers. The latter have combed decoration below a thin green glaze.

Later medieval and post-medieval

TF5. Hard, finely micaceous red earthenware, red-brown in surface colour with a grey inner core. The internal surfaces of the vessels are covered in a dark green glaze. Forms: Bowls/dishes.

TF6. Pinkish-orange, dense, hard fine sandy ware with sparse red iron. Thin orange-brown glaze on the exterior surface. Form: Jug. ?Late Medieval.

TF8. Hard, dark orange, sandy ware with a high density of fine well-sorted quartz sand and sparse iron. Form: Unglazed, wheelmade vessel.

TF11. Surrey-Hampshire glazed border wares. Late 16th–18th centuries. Forms: Butter pot.

TF12. Dense granular, micaceous ware. Form: Wheelmade thin-walled vessel of brownish-black colour with a sooted exterior. No featured sherds.

TF13. Very fine, highly micaceous brown or orange ware with a grey core. No visible inclusions. Either plain or with an internal glaze with external splatters. Form: Small cooking pot (Fig 11). ?Late Medieval.

TF14. Hard fired, finely micaceous ware with red-brown surfaces and a grey core. No featured sherds.

TF15. Post-medieval unglazed red earthenware.

TF16. Unglazed, pink micaceous, fine sandy ware. Form: Bowl.

TF17. Miscellaneous post-medieval red earthenwares, internally glazed.

TF18. Imported German stoneware. ?Frechen. 16th–17th centuries.

TF19. Fine sandy, grey, ware with sparse black iron, flint and white calcareous inclusions. Internal and external glaze. Probably a Surrey-Hampshire border ware. Form: Chamber pot, Holling 1971, type L1. 17th–18th century.

TF20. Whieldon ware. Mid 18th century+.

TF21. Tudor Green. Form: Small cup or beaker rim. 15th–16th century.

Discussion of the pottery assemblage

Late 12th–mid 13th centuries

A small group of wares could be dated to this period, possibly from the late 12th century and

Fig 4

- Handled pitcher, fabric 1. The exterior is decorated with lightly incised wavy lines under a white slip. Trench F, F19 (70) and F20 (71).
- Handmade, unglazed cooking pot rim. Fabric 4. Trench F, F20 (71).
- Handmade, unglazed cooking pot. Fabric 2. Trench F, F19 (70).
- Handmade jug. Fabric 2 with a patchy external green glaze. Trench F, F19, (70).
- Bodysherd from a decorated jug/pitcher in Fabric 2. The external surface is decorated with a slipped stripe and an applied stamp covered with a thin green glaze. Trench F, F19, (70).
- Handmade, unglazed cooking pot with a scalloped rim. Fabric 3. Trench F.
- Handmade cooking pot with an external white slip. Fabric 1. Trench F.
- ?Wheelmade, unglazed cooking pot, sooted on the exterior rim. Fabric 10. Trench G, F9, (59).
- Rimsherd from a handmade, unglazed cooking pot. Sooted on the exterior surface. Fabric 3. Trench G, F9, (59).
- Rimsherd from a large, handmade cooking pot with traces of an applied thumbled strip around the base of the neck. Fabric 4 with a thin external red-brown glaze. Trench M. F23, (73).
- Small unglazed, wheelmade cooking pot. Fabric 13. Trench C, 2–3 m surface.

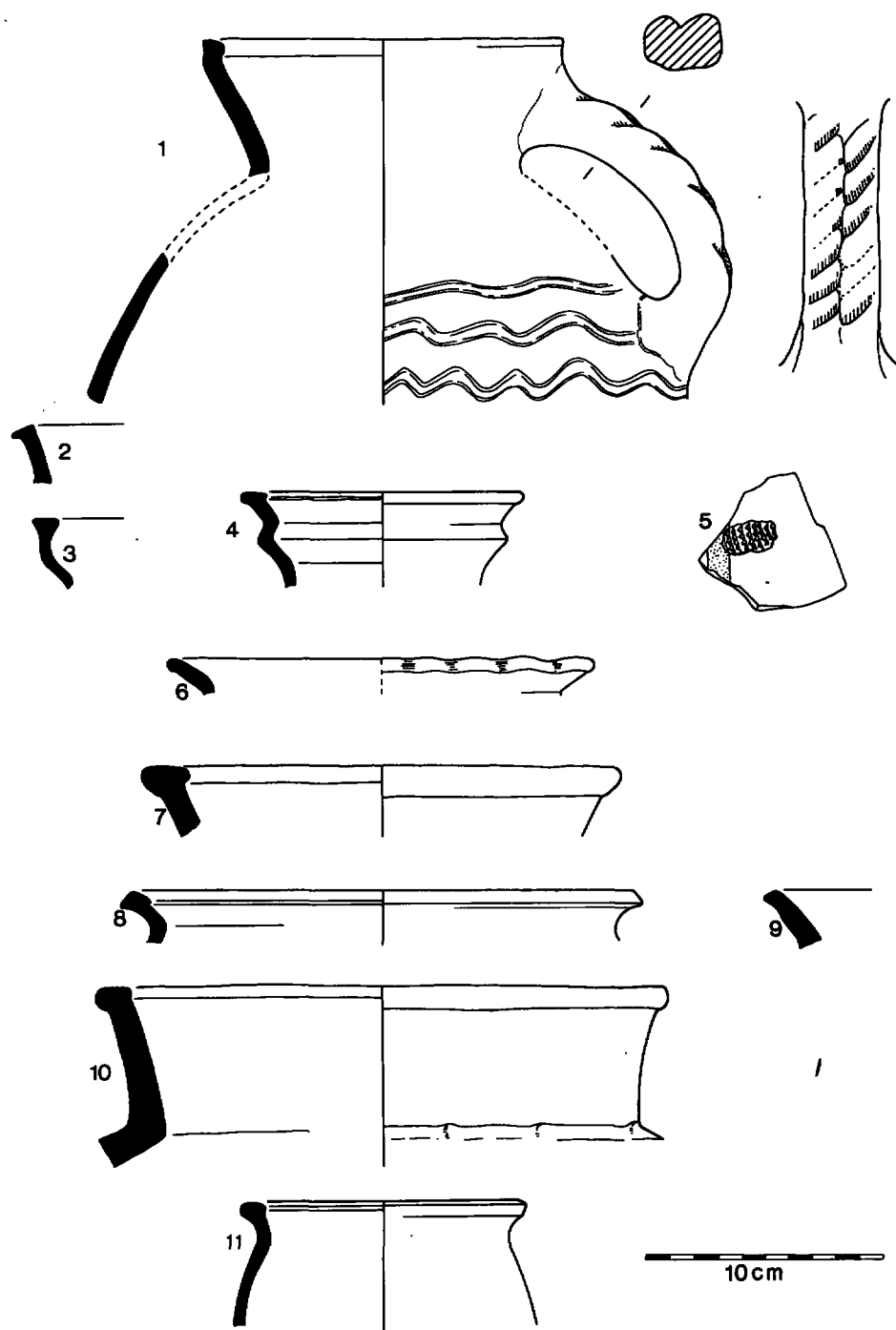


Fig 4. Pottery

thus in part contemporary with material already excavated from Sheep Street in 1976 (Fox and Hughes 1993). This is of some significance with regard to the early occupation of Petersfield. Of particular note were several joining sherds from a handled tripod pitcher in fabric 1 from Trench F, F19 and F20 (Fig 4, 1). A number of scratch-marked sherds from cooking pots in fabrics 3 and 7 are also of early date. The tradition of scratch-marking wares dates from the late 11th century. Evidence from Laverstock, Wiltshire suggests it continued to be used, however, until the late 13th century (Musty et al, 1969, 145). Scratch-marked wares were recovered from Trenches F and H and were present amongst material from Sheep Street (Fox and Hughes 1993). Several sherds from unglazed cooking pots were also present in the assemblage, mainly of types current in the later 12th–mid 13th centuries (Fig 4; 2, 6, 7, 9 and 10). A rim from a baluster-type jug (Fig 4, 4) was recovered from Trench F and probably dates to the mid 13th century. It is noteworthy that none of the fabrics identified to this period occur amongst contemporary material from Southampton (D Brown pers comm).

Although a number of kilns have been identified from the Hampshire–Sussex region (see below) few have shown evidence for later 12th century production. Most assemblages from the area show typologically similar wares to those identified at Petersfield.

Mid 13th–mid 14th centuries

A number of glazed jug/pitcher sherds in fabrics 2, 3, 10 and 13 were present. Many of the jugs were decorated with combed or incised wavy lines combined with vertical slipped lines applied before the glaze was added. There was one example of an applied stamp (Fig 4, 5). A small number of wheelmade, unglazed cooking pots (eg. Fig 4, 8) and some of the scratch-marked wares noted above may also date to this period.

Several kilns have been documented from the Hampshire and West Sussex region largely in production from the 13th century onwards, for example, Bentley (Barton and Brears 1976), Alice Holt (Lyne and Jefferies 1974), Chichester (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, 320ff) and Binsted (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, 322ff) to mention a

few. In most cases the products are sandy wares not always easily distinguishable macroscopically, although it has been demonstrated that characterisation by textural analysis can fingerprint individual kilns (Streeten 1980). The Petersfield fabrics do not closely resemble material from the Surrey–Hampshire kilns which may perhaps suggest a more localised source, perhaps from the West Sussex area.

15th century to modern

These wares were relatively poorly represented compared to the number of earlier sherds recovered, as features of later post-medieval date were generally not investigated. Of particular note for the later medieval period was a single small rimsherd of Tudor Green (TF21) from Trench D dating to the 15th–mid 16th century and a small wheelmade cooking pot in fabric 13 (Fig 4, 11). From the post-medieval period there was a Surrey–Hampshire border ware (TF11) butter pot rim from Trench J of probable 17th-century date; two bases from imported German stoneware vessels from Trench M, probably Frechen and dating to the 16th–17th centuries, and several sherds from a glazed chamber pot of Holling (1971) type L1, dating to the 17th–18th century from Trench H.

CONCLUSION

A small number of finds and deposits of archaeological significance were discovered during the course of the project. A number of ditches/gullies are thought to indicate property boundaries of medieval/post-medieval date. The hearth and ash pit are more indicative of medieval occupation or industrial activity but no further deposits were discovered nearby and any other deposits in the vicinity may have been destroyed in a previous phase of development. The well, discovered during the watching brief, was capped off in relatively recent times but could have originated in the medieval period.

As with all watching briefs of the kind carried out here, ground conditions were not ideal for the recognition and interpretation of archaeological features. The features discovered during the

evaluation, in Trench F, for example, were not relocated during the watching brief. However, examination of spoilheaps and exposed subsoil levels produced extremely low quantities and small sizes of medieval sherds. This seems to indicate a low level of activity and confidence can be placed in the supposition that nothing of significance has been missed.

The pottery assemblage provides a small but useful corpus of comparative material, providing, as it does, the second group of medieval pottery from the town, the first being that from Sheep Street (Fox and Hughes 1993). It includes pottery dating to the late 12th century and taken in conjunction with the material from Sheep Street, this corresponds well to documentary evidence

suggesting that the town was laid out at this time (Hughes 1976). The assemblage also shows a distinctive composition with, for example, no wares similar to those present in contemporary Southampton or the Surrey/Hampshire border region.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to acknowledge the help of David Bailey, of Plincke, Leaman and Browning, Martin Hardman of Wates Ltd and Martin Oake of Hampshire County Council during the course of this project. Jane Timby is grateful to Duncan Brown for reading the pottery report and for his helpful comments.

REFERENCES

- Anon, 1984 *High Street, Petersfield: A historical survey of the main street of a small country town*. Petersfield Area Historical Society monograph 2.
- Barton, K J and Brears, P C D 1976 A medieval pottery kiln at Bentley, Hampshire, *Proc Hampshire Fld Club Archaeol Soc* **32**, 71–5.
- Ford, S 1990 *Archaeological evaluation of Petersfield town centre redevelopment site*. Thames Valley Archaeological Services, report 90/4. Reading.
- Fox, R and Hughes, M 1993 Excavations at Sheep Street, Petersfield 1976, *Proc Hampshire Fld Club Archaeol Soc* **49**, 159–74.
- Holling, F W 1971 A preliminary note on the pottery industry of the Hampshire–Surrey borders, *Surrey Archaeol Collect* **68**, 57–88.
- Hughes, M 1976 *The Small Towns of Hampshire*. Southampton.
- Lyne, M and Jefferies, R S 1974 The Alice Holt medieval potters, *Surrey Archaeol Collect* **70**, 25–46.
- McCarthy, M R, and Brooks, C M 1988 *Medieval Pottery in Britain AD 900–1600*. Leicester.
- Musty, J, Algar, D J and Ewence, P F 1969 The medieval pottery kilns at Laverstock, near Salisbury, Wiltshire, *Archaeologia* **102**, 83–150.
- Streeten, A D F 1980 Potters, kilns and markets in medieval Sussex: A preliminary study, *Sussex Archaeol Collect* **118**, 105–118.

Authors: Leigh J Torrance and Steve Ford, Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 77 Watlington Street, Reading, Berks, RG1 4RQ.

© *Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*