

Medieval Settlement Evidence from Lower Poole Road, Dursley, Excavations in 2007

by E.R MCSLOY, MARY ALEXANDER and DAVID KENYON

In 2006 an archaeological evaluation at 15 Lower Poole Road, Dursley (O.S. Nat. Grid ST 7580 9793; Fig. 1), identified part of a shallow pit or ditch terminus containing pottery of medieval date (CA 2006). As a consequence of this discovery, an archaeological condition was placed on planning permission for residential development and the site was excavated. The work was carried out in September 2007 by Cotswold Archaeology (CA) on the behalf of Hannick

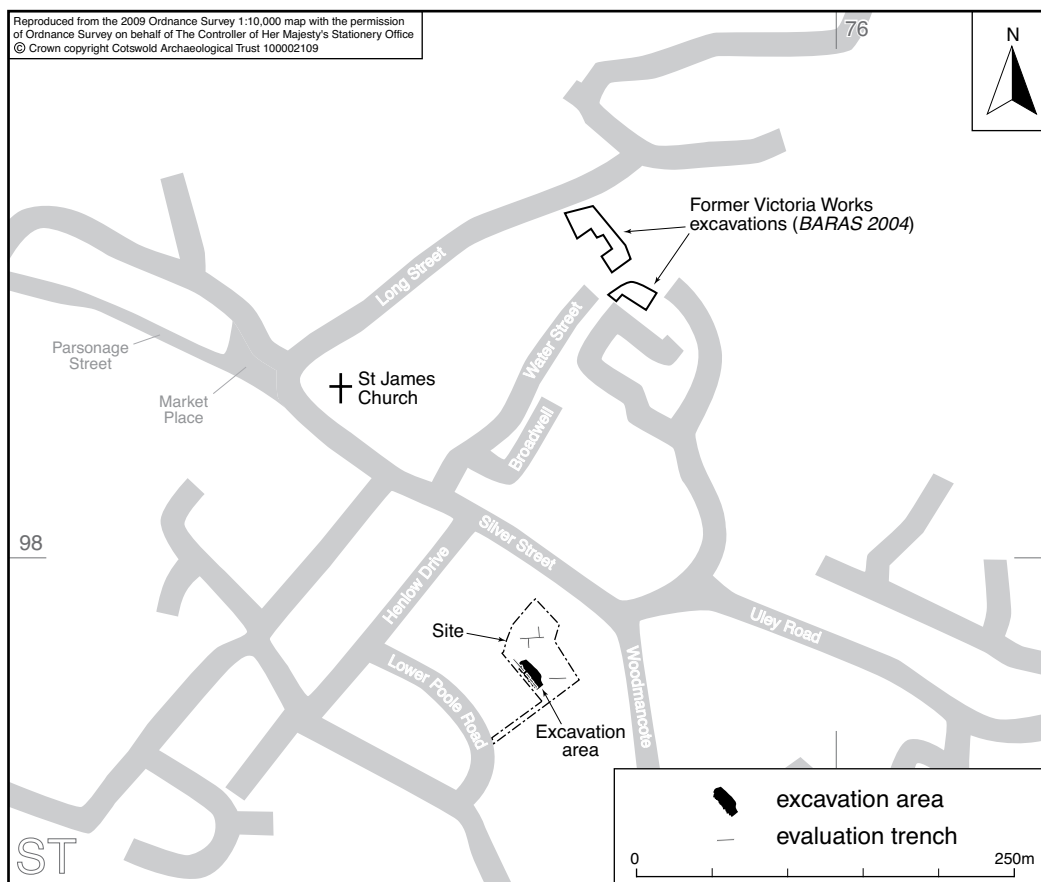


Fig. 1. Lower Poole Road, Dursley: site location (1:5000).

Homes. The excavation was targeted on the location of the possible medieval feature and an area of approximately 200m² was stripped. Following the removal of the topsoil and subsoil a number of cut features were identified cutting the natural clay substrate (Fig. 2). These features were hand-excavated, planned, photographed and recorded. All recovered artefacts were processed and recorded. Analysis of the pottery is reported in this article; a report on the animal bone is available in the archive.

A circular pit 1045, with a diameter of 0.9m and 0.4m deep, was identified at the western edge of the excavation area (Fig. 2, section AA), from which 12th to early 13th-century pottery and animal bone was retrieved. The animal bone included sheep, goose and cattle-sized fragments and is typical of a domestic assemblage. A large posthole 1067, with almost vertical sides, to the north-east of the pit is also dated to the medieval period from the pottery recovered from its fill (Fig. 2, section BB). A shallow sinuous ditch 1053 to the east of pit 1045 contained two small sherds of medieval pottery, a further seven sherds were recovered from feature 104 excavated in the evaluation trench. Although this feature was truncated, it may represent the western ditch

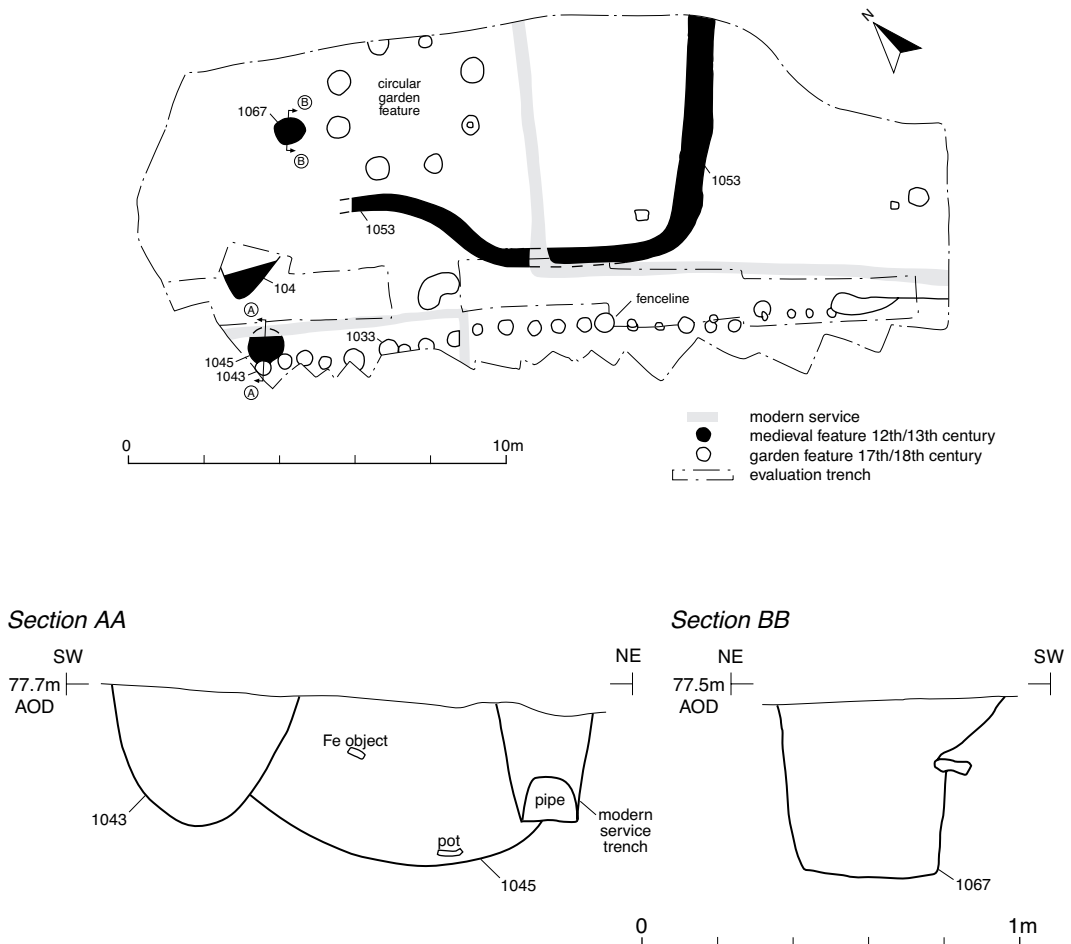


Fig. 2. Plan of excavated features (1:200) and sections (1:20).

terminus. A quantity of limestone fragments, found within the ditch fill, are probably waste discarded from the robbing of a wall foundation. Given the absence of any finds of a later date, this ditch may also belong to the medieval period.

A line of fence posts and a circular arrangement of posts are thought to demarcate more modern garden structures, as fragments of glass, clay pipes and pottery, dated to the late 17th to early 18th centuries, were found in some of the postholes from both groups. Fence post 1043 cut the medieval pit 1045, and residual medieval pottery was found in this feature and other postholes at the north-western end of the fence line. A copper alloy pin of medieval form was also found in the fill of fence post 1043.

The Pottery by E.R. McSloy

This is a small pottery assemblage, of 391 sherds weighing 4.19 kg, of which 37 sherds (10%) were recovered from the subsoil (layer 1000); the remainder were from the fills of cut features. Two sherds of Roman pottery were residual finds in medieval or later deposits. The larger part of the assemblage dates to the medieval period, probably between the 12th and earlier 13th centuries, and mainly derived from the fills of features 1045 and 1067. In addition, seven sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from feature 104 (fill 103), identified in the evaluation. A series of modern garden features identified across the site produced small quantities of residual pottery of medieval and post-medieval date. The condition of the pottery was generally good, with the exception of the residual Roman sherds. It is clear that the medieval groups from pit 1045 and posthole 1067, though fragmented, are composed of a relatively small number of vessels (Table 2), with substantial portions of some vessels represented. The level of fragmentation results in a relatively modest mean sherd weight of 11 g for the stratified medieval groups. A feature of some vessels from the medieval assemblage is the loss of calcareous inclusions over inner and outer surfaces. This appears unlikely to have resulted from use and may relate to solution-leaching of less robust limestone inclusions.

Methodology

The assemblage was examined by context, sorted into fabrics, and recorded according to the standards recommended by the Medieval Pottery Research Group (MPRG 2001). Quantification was according to sherd count, weight in grammes, minimum vessel number, and rim EVEs (a measure of the surviving rim circumference). Vessel form and such attributes as visible residues and use-wear were also recorded. Pottery fabrics were matched to existing pottery type-series from the wider area, including Gloucester (Vince 1983) and Bristol (Ponsford 1998). The excavated material was also compared to the large medieval and post-medieval assemblage known from recent excavations at Long Street (Lister's former Victoria Works), Dursley (Vince forthcoming).

Roman

A small (2 g) and abraded sherd of Severn Valley ware was recovered from a modern posthole. This was a (bead) rim sherd from a thin-walled vessel of uncertain form. A second Roman sherd in a fine, reduced-firing (grey) fabric was from the subsoil layer. Comparable fabrics are known commonly from Roman period sites in the area, including residual material from Long Street, Dursley (Vince forthcoming). Broad dating between the later 1st and 4th centuries can be suggested for these sherds.

Medieval

Pottery of medieval date amounted to 354 sherds representing 66 vessels (3.07 rim EVEs) and weighing 3732 g. The larger portion of the medieval assemblage was recovered from the fills of pit 1045 and posthole 1067 (Table 2). A small group of seven sherds (62 g), comprising bodysherds in fabric COTS1, was recovered from feature 104 identified in the evaluation. Cross-context joins between the medieval pottery from layer 1000 and the fills of 1045 and 1067 indicate the subsoil derives at least in part from material re-worked from the upper fills of medieval features.

Fabrics

Medieval fabrics are described below. For other, mainly post-medieval types reference is made to published descriptions (Table 1).

Table 1: Summary quantification by fabric. Shown as estimated vessel number, sherd count and weight in grams.

Date	Fabric*	Vs.	Ct.	Wt.	EVEs
Roman	Misc. reduced	1	1	1	–
	Severn Valley ware	1	1	1	.01
	Sub-total	2	2	2	.01
medieval	MED LOC1	8	89	1295	1.46
	MED LOC2	3	10	97	.08
	COTS1	43	238	2106	1.02
	COTS2	6	10	123	.31
	MED LOC3	5	6	109	0.18
	Ham green A/B (BPT 26)	1	1	2	.02
	Sub-total	66	354	3732	3.07
Post-medieval/ modern	China (BPT 202)	4	4	17	.13
	Creamware (BPT 326)	1	1	1	.01
	‘Flowerpot’ (BPT 201)	1	1	3	.01
	Yellow slipware (BPT 100)	1	1	4	0
	North Devon Grav. Temp. (BPT 112)	3	4	91	.09
	White stoneware (BPT 186)	1	1	2	.08
	‘Tiger’ stoneware (BPT 211)	1	1	4	.10
	Misc. glazed earthenware (BPT 285)	16	16	207	.16
	South Somerset sgraffito (BPT 334)	1	2	11	.08
	Westerwald stoneware (BPT 95)	1	1	5	.09
	Tin-glazed earthenware (BPT 99)	2	2	11	.01
	S. Somerset Slipware (BPT 334)	1	1	1	0
	Sub-total	33	35	357	0.76
Total		101	391	4091	3.84

* ‘BPT’ codes relate to Bristol type series (see Ponsford 1998)

COTS1: Oolitic limestone-tempered ware (Incorporates Glos TF41B)

Mid or darker mid-brown surfaces with dark-grey core. Hard, with smooth surface feel and irregular break. Abundant limestone gravel inclusions mainly composed of moderately-sorted

oolitic limestone, including single ooliths (1mm–3mm). In some instances inclusions are leached. Handmade.

COTS2: Coarser oolitic limestone-tempered ware

Patchy dark grey-brown/mid brown surfaces with dark grey core. May have red-brown margin. Hard, with smooth or soapy surface feel and irregular break. Sparse to common limestone gravel inclusions mainly composed of poorly-sorted oolitic limestone (2mm–4mm). In some instances inclusions are leached. Handmade.

MED LOC1: ?Local sandy with calcareous inclusions and red iron, micaceous

Patchy mid brown/grey surfaces with grey core. Hard, with sandy surface feel and finely irregular break. Common well-sorted clear quartz sand (0.3–0.5mm); common to sparse sub-rounded red iron oxide (1mm–2mm); sparse shell (1mm–2mm). Handmade.

MED LOC2: ?Local sandy with calcareous inclusions and red iron

Light brown outer surface with dark-grey core and interior. Hard, with sandy surface feel and finely irregular break. Common well-sorted clear quartz sand (0.3–0.5mm) with limestone gravel including rounded ooliths (0.5mm–1mm) and plate-like shell (2mm–4mm); common to sparse sub-rounded red iron oxide (1mm–2mm); abundant mica visible to surfaces. Handmade.

MED LOC 3: ?Local buff, gritty

Buff/light brown surfaces with grey core. Hard, with sandy/harsh surface feel and finely irregular break. Abundant well-sorted clear quartz sand (0.3–0.5mm); sparse limestone (1mm) and sparse sub-rounded red iron oxide (0.5mm–1mm). Handmade.

The represented fabrics are predominantly of the oolitic-limestone gravel-tempered coarsewares (COTS 1–2) which characterise large areas of the Cotswolds between the 11th and 13th/early 14th centuries. Production for wares in this tradition (Gloucester fabric TF41b) is attested at Haresfield, Gloucestershire, approximately 13km to the north of Dursley. Material from this source was identified from among the large Long Street assemblage (Vince forthcoming), where forms suggested dating between the 12th and earlier 13th centuries.

A small proportion of the pottery, including material from pits 1045 and posthole 1067 occurred in fabrics (MED LOC 1–3) dissimilar to the Cotswolds-type oolitic-limestone-tempered types and is probably of local origin. These putative local types share some affinities with material from among the Long Street assemblage (Vince forthcoming, type Dursley A–E), confirmed as of local derivation through thin-section analysis.

The groups from pit 1045 and posthole 1067 comprise a relatively small number of heavily fragmented vessels, all belonging to coarse, cooking-pot type fabrics (Table 2). Identifiable forms mostly consist of (a minimum of 13) everted-rim jars with globular or straighter-sided profile and with flat or slightly sagging bases. Rim morphology exhibits some variation (Fig. 3, nos 1 and 3–5). In addition there is a fragment of a jar with ‘clubbed’-rim (Fig. 3, no. 2), and a base sherd (fill 1044/fabric COTS1: not ill.) from an inturned or ‘West Country vessel’ type (MPRG 1998 5.3.1). The latter, as the classification implies is a form more commonly noted among assemblages from the western counties of England (Jope 1952, 65). More complete examples feature wall-perforations, leading in part to their interpretation as bee-hive bases, with a woven straw ‘skep’ supported above

Table 2: The stratified medieval assemblage. Shown as estimated vessel number, sherd count and weight in grams.

Fabric	Pit 1045			Pit 1067			Ditch 1053			Eval. feature 104		
	Vs.	Ct.	Wt.	Vs.	Ct.	Wt.	Vs.	Ct.	Wt.	Vs.	Ct.	Wt.
COTS1	21	167	1314	3	39	512	1	2	6	7	7	62
COTS2	4	4	74	1	4	130						
MED LOC1	2	25	216	3	59	1026						
MED LOC2				1	8	41						
Totals	27	196	1604	8	110	1709	1	2	6	7	7	62

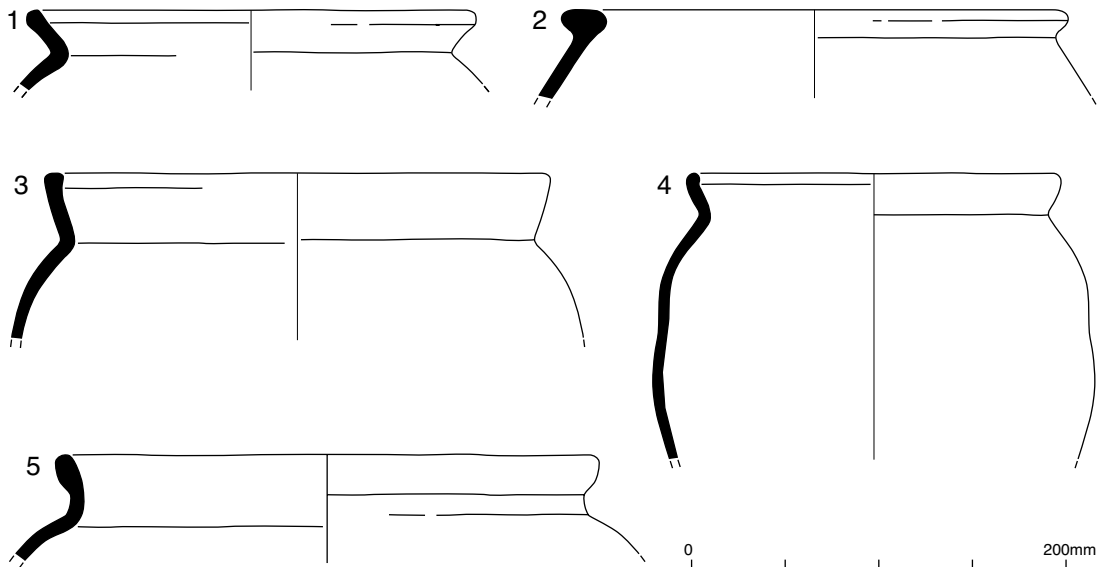


Fig. 3. Medieval pottery (1:4).

and with the perforated vessel permitting access for the bees and perhaps assisting the collection of the honey.

Small quantities of medieval pottery (10 sherds weighing 57 g) were recovered as residual finds from modern postholes. This material comprises mainly small and abraded bodysherds in coarseware types (COTS1; MED LOC1; MED LOC3). In addition a single, abraded, glazed jug sherd was identified from posthole 1033 as of Bristol Ham Green type (BPT26), dateable between *c.* 1120 and *c.* 1250 (Ponsford 1998).

Evidence for use as cooking vessels occurred with a minimum of ten vessels from features 1045, 1067 and layer 1000. A further two vessels from posthole 1067 feature thick, carbonised internal residues, presumed to represent burnt food deposits.

Discussion

The restricted nature of the pit groups, particularly the absence of glazed jug or pitcher forms inhibits close dating. Saxo-Norman (11th/earlier 12th-century) material of types known from Bristol and Gloucester, and present in very small quantities from the Long Street assemblage (Vince forthcoming) are not represented. Similarly jars with shorter and simpler everted rims, which typically are seen on vessels dating between the 11th and earlier 12th centuries, do not occur. The clubbed-rim jar (Fig. 3, no. 2) and West-Country vessel are more commonly recognised as earlier medieval forms. For such reasons a 12th-century or earlier 13th-century date is considered most likely, at least for the group from pit 1045.

The vessel forms represented within the fills of 1045 and 1067, the evidence for use (as cooking pots) and the associated faunal remains, suggest these deposits represent secondary use of these features as rubbish pits. Whilst absence of pitcher or jug forms from these deposits could be significant, the groups are too small to support notions of higher or lower status. The presence of a base sherd belonging to a perforated vessel form is interesting. Additional examples of this form were found at Long Street. Clustering of finds of vessels of this type in the region is considered as further evidence of a specialist use, which might include bee-keeping (Vince, pers comm.). The presence of sandy fabrics (MED LOC 1–3) with affinities to examples from Long Street adds to the corpus of wares from an unknown but local source of production.

Post-medieval and later

A small quantity (35 sherds weighing 357 g) of pottery of post-medieval or later dating was recovered from the series of postholes representing modern activity, and from the subsoil layer 1000. The majority of pottery consists of small sherds (the mean sherd weight is approximately 10 g), occurring in types mostly suggestive of dating between the late 17th and mid/late 18th centuries. Sherds of refined whiteware 'china' from layer 1000, evaluation garden feature fill 126 and a posthole from the fenceline date after *c.* 1780. The quantities and fragmented condition of this material is suggestive of low-level activity of this date.

The Copper Alloy Pin by E.R. McSloy

Although from a modern feature, the dimensions and other characteristics of the copper-alloy pin are consistent with medieval dating (Crummy 1988, 7). Pins of this type manufactured from drawn wire were used to fasten clothing. Evidence from London suggests that most date to the 14th and 15th centuries (Egan and Pritchard 1991, 299–301). Examples with heads which are white-metal plated in imitation of silver, appear to be rare, although the thin coating would have been susceptible to wear and the practice was probably widespread (*ibid.*, 299).

Not ill. From (modern) posthole fill 1042. Copper-alloy pin with spherical head formed from wound wire. There are traces of white-metal (tinning?) to the head. The pin is complete, although shank is distorted. Length: approx. 60mm. Diameter: 1.6mm (shank); 3.8mm (head).

Discussion

Pit 1045, posthole 1067 and the overall pottery and metalwork assemblage from Lower Poole Road indicate the proximity of medieval settlement. Pit 1045 is stratigraphically earlier and

morphologically distinct from the adjacent fenceline, and characteristics of the pottery and bone assemblage indicate the disposal of domestic debris from a nearby source. The large posthole 1067 displays a sloping lip on its south-west side, suggesting the removal of the post, and the fill represents secondary use as a rubbish pit. There is nothing to suggest the structure to which it may have belonged, unless the sinuous ditch 1053 is associated. The inclusion of a pottery fragment of a possible bee-hive within the posthole fill hints at a use to which the area may have been put. Within the context of what is surmised for the medieval settlement at Dursley, the Lower Poole Road site lies on the south-eastern perimeter of the suggested extent of the medieval town. The site would have lain to the rear of any properties fronting Silver Street. The medieval features lie within the location depicted on the 1844 tithe map of Dursley Town of a 'house, garden, stables, yard and lawn', while the 1844 tithe map of Dursley parish shows the site edged by orchards to the west and south. The first (1883), second (1902), and third (1921) editions of the O.S. 25 inch map series confirm its 'back-plot' status into the early 20th century. Bee-keeping would not be out of place as part of a similar pattern of land-use in the medieval period.

The place name Dursley, derived from the Old English 'Deorsige's clearing', suggests pre-conquest origins for a settlement here, which was part of the Berkley Estates in 1086 (Leech 1981, 26). The development of the medieval town was precipitated by the grant of a burgrave and the founding of a Castle in the mid 12th century. Narrow property plots typical of medieval burgraves flanking Parsonage Street, Silver Street, and Long Street depicted on the 1844 tithe map of Dursley Town suggest the core of the medieval town was centered at the confluence of these streets where the market place and church are located. An area of irregular development to the east of the church in the Broadwell area has been suggested as the location of a pre-borough hamlet (Douthwaite and Devine 1998, 77). Archaeological discoveries of recent years support the extent of the medieval settlement surmised from the cartographic evidence, but also hint at an early focus for settlement on the east side of the medieval town (King 2007). Excavations at the former Victoria Works towards the north end of Long Street revealed an 11th-century timber structure replaced in the 12th or 13th century by stone foundations (Jackson, forthcoming). The 12th to early 13th-century features excavated at Lower Poole Road are evidence for settlement at a relatively early date on the eastern edge of the medieval town as it is currently defined (Douthwaite and Devine 1998, map 25).

Acknowledgements

The excavation was supervised by David Kenyon and managed by Clifford Bateman. We are grateful to Hannick Homes for funding the excavation and this report. The excavation was monitored by Charles Parry, who also provided valuable information on the extent of the medieval town plan for this report. Thanks are due to Reg Jackson and Alan Vince for supplying a manuscript of their Long Street report ahead of publication. Neil Holbrook commented on an earlier version of this report. The animal bone from Lower Poole Road was analysed by Sylvia Warman, and the pottery was quantified by Teresa Gilmore. The illustrations were prepared by Jemma Elliot, and Pete Moore who also drew the pottery. The project archive and finds will be deposited with the Museum in the Park, Stroud.

Bibliography

Non-printed

1844–5 [GRO MF 1127/74, PC 1812/71] Tithe map and Apportionment of Dursley, J. P. Sturge of Bristol valuer. (G. Gwatkin facsimile 1992–8)

Printed

CA 2006. 15 Lower Poole Road, Dursley, Gloucestershire: Archaeological Evaluation. (unpublished Cotswold Archaeol. report 06054)

Crummy, N., 1988. *The post-Roman small finds from excavations in Colchester 1971–85* Colchester Archaeol. Report No. 5, Colchester, Colchester Archaeol. Trust

Douthwaite A., and Devine V., 1998. 'Gloucestershire Historic Towns Survey: Stroud District' (Gloucester, Glos. County Archaeol. Service)

Egan, G., and Pritchard, F., 1991. *Medieval finds from excavations in London 3: Dress Accessories c. 1150–c. 1450* Museum of London/Stationery Office, London

Heighway, C., 1983. *The East and North Gates of Gloucester*, Western Archaeol. Trust Excavation Monograph No. 4, Bristol

Jackson, R., forthcoming, 'Excavations in Long Street, Dursley, Gloucestershire, 2004' (working title) (Bristol and Region Archaeol. Services Monograph)

Jope, E.M., 1952. 'Medieval Pottery', in O'Neil 1952, 61–76

King, A., 2007. 'Archaeological Evaluation at Land at the Former Lister-Petter Drawing Office Site, Long Street, Dursley' (unpublished Bristol and Region Archaeol. Services report 9213)

Leech, R., 1981. 'Dursley' in R. Leech, (ed) *Historic Towns in Gloucestershire; Archaeology and Planning, 1981*, 26–29, Gloucester

O'Neil, H., 1952. 'Whittington Court Roman Villa, Whittington, Gloucestershire: a report of the Excavations undertaken from 1948 to 1951', *Trans. BGAS* 71, 13–87

Ordnance Survey first edition 25": 1 mile, 1883, map sheets 56/3, 56/4

Ordnance Survey second edition 25": 1 mile, 1902, sheets 56/3, 56/4

Ordnance Survey third edition 25": 1 mile, 1921, sheets 56/3, 56/4

Ponsford, M.W., 1998. 'Pottery' in Price with Ponsford 1998, 136–56

Price, R., with Ponsford M.W., 1998. *St Bartholomew's Hospital, Bristol: The Excavation of a Medieval Hospital 1976–8* York, Council Brit. Archaeol. Res. Rep. 110

MPRG (Medieval Pottery Research Group) 1998. A Guide to the Classification of Medieval Ceramic Forms', Medieval Pottery Res. Grp Occ. Pap. 1

Vince, A.G. 1983. 'The Medieval Pottery', in Heighway 1983, 125–31

Vince, A., forthcoming 'The Roman, Medieval and Early Post-Medieval Pottery' in Jackson forthcoming