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AN 18TH CENTURY PIT GROUP FROM STAFFORD

By Mary J. Kershaw

SUMMARY

A large quantity of domestic post-medieval ceramics and glass was recovered by the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit during excavations at Nos. 7 and 8 St. Mary's Grove, Stafford. One pit group was of particular interest, representing a contemporaneous deposit of a large group of 18th century material. The assemblage gives a useful illustration of the range of kitchen and table wares in use during the third quarter of the 18th century.

INTRODUCTION

Excavations at St. Mary's Grove, Stafford, by the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit in 1982-4 yielded a sequence of occupation from the Roman period through to the present day. Owing to pressure of time, 19th and 20th century levels were removed mechanically, and the 18th century deposits were excavated quickly by hand. The large quantity of 18th century remains included one particularly significant pit group (Feature 13, Context 1051) which contained a large assemblage of household ceramics, glass and other material. The finds from this context consist of a large group of functional household ceramics, glassware including at least four phials and 30 almost complete bottles, 69 pieces of clay tobacco pipes, some badly corroded iron, two bone knife handles and a quantity of oyster shell and animal bone.

THE SITE

The houses which comprise Nos. 7 and 8 St. Mary's Grove occupy the southern end of the site, and stand just to the north of St. Mary's Church. The presence of medieval burials in the south-western end of the site suggests that the properties encroached on the boundaries of the Church's medieval cemetery. The present houses were constructed in the late 17th to early 18th century, replacing (an) earlier structure(s) on the site. The property was built as a pair of adjoining houses with a symmetrical frontage, mainly of brick with an internal oak structure. They represent a transition in building style from the traditional timber-framed construction to the newly fashionable brick. The method and style of construction, coupled with the prominent location of the site are indicative of the prosperity of the occupants.

(The description of the properties is based upon the historical and structural survey by F.W.B. Charles MA Barch FSA).

The large amount of post-medieval material recovered from this site can be clearly associated with the occupants of Nos. 7 and 8 St. Mary's Grove, and is principally the accumulation of domestic debris from these properties. Feature 13 fits into this category, although it does not represent the slow accumulation of rubbish over time. The context within the pit was consistently an ashy, charcoally sand, and this uniformity indicated that the large assemblage of material was present as the result of one episode of deposition, possibly a household clearance. The majority of the pieces from this context were complete, or nearly complete, and it can be assumed that the material within this group was all in use contemporaneously, although the period of manufacture could have ranged from the late 17th century up to the date of deposition. The overall composition of the group suggests a deposition date of *c.* 1775.

Although documentary information about the household could provide a useful insight into the material recovered, a summary investigation of the historical documentation of the properties by members of the Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit failed to reveal the owners of the properties at this period.

THE CERAMICS

The ceramics formed the major part of the material recovered, and included white salt-glazed stoneware, mottled ware, lesser amounts of lead-glazed coarse earthenwares of varying degrees of quality, cream-ware, small amounts of slipware, brown salt-glazed stoneware, Jackfield-type ware, tin-glazed earthenware, porcelain, grey salt-glazed stoneware and fine glazed red earthenware. Overall, the group lacks clear distinguishing features, and none of the pieces bears a manufacturer's mark. There are few unusual forms represented, and the group as a whole consists of popular mass-produced forms which are primarily utilitarian, with no purely decorative pieces present. Table wares, kitchen wares and chamber pots are the main forms, and the more elaborate functional pieces such as tureens, ewers and basins or such like are not present. Plates, bowls, dishes and drinking vessels comprise the majority of the tableware.

127. Small mallet bottle, whole profile. Seal on upper body, reading I.D. The seal impression was taken from a circular die of 2.6 cm diameter. Slender flaring neck with double bevelled string rim. Mid yellowish brown. 12 fragments. 1740–1770. Fig. 12.127
128. Cylindrical bottle, 26 fragments from neck and body. Light green glass. Mid–late 18th century.
129. Mallet bottle, base to shoulders. Broadest at base, light green glass. 10 joining fragments. 1730–1770.
130. Base of cylindrical bottle. Slight waisting. Light green glass with slight patination. 1 fragment. 1730–1810.
131. Mallet/cylindrical bottle, neck and shoulder. Double bevelled string rim. Light green glass. 4 joining fragments. 1730–1770. Fig. 12.131
- 131b. 3 unrelated fragments of light green glass from a vessel of similar form.
132. Mallet/cylindrical bottle, neck only. Double bevelled string rim on broad tapering neck. Light green patination. 1 fragment. Mid–late 18th century. Fig. 12.132
- 132b. 4 joining body sherds, light green, possibly from the above vessel.
133. Mallet/squat cylindrical bottle, neck and upper body. Double bevelled string rim on short parallel-sided neck. Top of neck roughly trimmed. Mid greenish brown glass. 5 fragments. Mid-18th century. Fig. 12.133
134. 18 body sherds of light green glass, possibly from cylindrical bottles, a few with light patination. Probably mid–late 18th century.
135. 2 small sherds, 1 body, 1 base. Light green glass with slight patination. Probably 18th century.

Other Forms

136. Base of square, clear glass bottle. Low kick-up. Square bottles in clear glass were produced for purposes other than wine containers from the mid-18th century onwards (Dumbrell 1983, 88–89).
137. Phial, complete. Cylindrical bodied, flat rimmed form, with conical kick-up and thin walls. Greenish-blue tinted clear glass. A larger example of similar form dated to the early 18th century is illustrated in Gibson and Evans 1985, 152, Fig. 1, no. 1. Fig. 12.137.
- 137b. Base of phial. Green glass, irregular conical kick-up.

- 137c. Neck of phial, possibly same vessel as No. 137b.
- 137d. 5 body sherds (2 joining) of cylindrical phial in very thin light green glass. Possibly same vessel as Nos. 137b. and 137c.
138. Base of large phial in clear, blue-tinted glass. Conical kick-up. 3 fragments.
- 138b. 3 joining wall and shoulder fragments, probably from same vessel No. 138.
- 138c. 3 shoulder fragments, probably from same vessel as Nos. 138 and 138b.
139. 5 small body sherds of clear glass.
- 139b. Rim of phial in clear glass.
- 139c. Base and handle of ?mug in clear glass. Looped handle with slight ribbing at lower junction with body. 6 fragments.

Flat Glass

140. 28 fragments of flat glass. This is tabulated by colour and thickness. Only two thicker fragments of bluish tinted glass showed any patination.

Thickness in mm.

Colour	> 1.0	1.0-1.5	1.5-2.0
Clear	1	1	–
Bluish tint	2	18	4
Light green	–	–	3
Total	3	19	7

THE CLAY TOBACCO PIPES

Report by David Higgins

The material recovered can be divided into two groups. The first consists of residual seventeenth and early eighteenth century material. There is one Broseley type 5 bowl (Atkinson 1975) of *c.* 1680–1720 marked IOS/BIN/NER (Fig. 13.141), and seven pieces of stem. The bowl and four of the stem fragments are burnished. The material is characterised by highly fired or coarser local fabrics. There were no joins between any of these pieces, and it is most unlikely that any of them had been in use when the pit was filled.

In contrast, the rest of the material appears to form a compact and closely dated group. It is characterised by large, thin-walled spur bowls, long thin stems and the use of better quality fabrics. A minimum of 13 bowls of this form are represented. With one exception (No. 149), all the bowls have an internal

knife cut bevel around the inside of the bowl rim. Just one of them (No. 150) has an internal bowl cross, formed by an incuse mark on the end of the stopper when the bowl was formed (Fig. 14.150). The burnishing is in all cases of average quality. Where both bowl and stem survive, there are six examples with both bowl and stem burnished. There are three stem marks, and one spiral stem twist (No. 143), all of them on burnished stems. Unfortunately, the marks are of little help with the dating. One of them is a symbol mark (No. 142, Fig. 13.142), another reads WIL/(A)MS/MITH (No. 144, Fig. 13.144), an as yet undocumented maker, while the third reads EDW/DEA/CON (No. 145, Fig. 13.145). Unfortunately there are several people of this name in Broseley during the eighteenth century, any one of whom could have been this pipemaker. Although of Broseley style, the William Smith mark is very crudely executed and does not necessarily come from that production centre.

The dating of the 18th century bowls is difficult because they change little in form, are rarely associated with marks and, being thin, do not survive as well as the 17th century forms. The predominant form in the group has the bowl rim cut back at an angle to the stem. This form is usually dated to *c.* 1740–70, although there is a gap in the typology from 1770–80 which is not covered by any form (Atkinson 1975). Towards the end of the century subtle changes take place in the bowl shape, and the bowl rim becomes parallel with the stem once again. These changes are usually dated from the 1780s. The group may represent an overlap of these styles, and therefore dates to *c.* 1770–1780.

DISCUSSION

As discussed in the separate sections above, it is extremely difficult to assign production centres for unmarked and largely undiagnostic pieces. With the exception of the porcelain, the brown salt-glazed stoneware and the grey salt-glazed stoneware, the ceramics in the group were all being produced in Stoke-on-Trent during the 18th century. Given the unexceptional nature of the material, there is no reason to suppose that the material would have been specially imported from a distance, and it is most likely that the vast majority of the pieces in this assemblage have a Stoke-on-Trent, or other local provenance.

While the ceramics have a possible range of manufacture from the late 17th century to *c.* 1770, it is the creamware which gives the assemblage its *terminus post quem* of roughly 1770. The large percentage of white salt-glazed stoneware, together with the absence of later material in the group, suggests that the date of deposition was not much later than the *terminus post quem*, or somewhere about

1775. This is supported by the independent dates of the glass bottles of 1700–1770, and the more tightly dated group of clay tobacco pipes of *c.* 1770–1780. Overall, it appears that the group represents a small scale house clearance of about 1775.

The reason for the house clearance is uncertain, although some suggestions can be put forward. The household may have been clearing out its 'old-fashioned' crockery in the advent of new stylistic developments, or ridding itself of a large amount of substandard, damaged or broken items. This presents some anomalies, however, in that it does not necessarily explain the presence of the mottled wares or coarse earthenwares which are less susceptible to the vagaries of fashion. This may perhaps indicate a change of ownership of the property and, should the documentation ever be uncovered, this would prove an interesting avenue of research.

This group makes an interesting comparison with other excavated household groups, particularly with the slightly later group from Haregate Hall, Leek, which dates to *c.* 1800–1810 (Barker & Barker 1984). Both groups have a range of domestic material ranging from utilitarian coarse earthenwares to finer tablewares. Both also have a significant number of flawed pieces which could be considered 'factory seconds'. The presence of these pieces may indicate a close proximity to a production centre. On the other hand, if similar pieces are discovered further afield, it could serve as a socio-economic indicator of a household which is aiming to have newer, finer tablewares, but presumably at a reduced price. The Stafford group differs from the Leek assemblage in having a large quantity of mottled wares, especially chamber pots, and it lacks the pearlwares present in this slightly later group.

The study of closely dated contemporaneous groups such as this provides useful dating and distribution evidence for the longer-lasting and less changeable materials such as the slipwares and coarse earthenwares. Domestic site evidence also provides a balanced view of ceramic production in the 18th century, complementing the more collectable pieces which have survived the filter of time.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Great thanks are due to David Barker who was instrumental in the identification and dating of the ceramic material, and who was most helpful in orchestrating the compilation of this report. I am indebted to Katherine White who painstakingly illustrated all of the ceramics, and to Ralph King who assisted in the preparation of the ceramic illustrations for publication. Additional illustrations are by David Barker (glass), David Higgins (clay tobacco pipes) and Jon Cane (site location). I am

grateful to David Higgins for his report on the clay tobacco pipes and to Robert Philpott for the report on the glass, both of which have been incorporated into this paper. My thanks are also extended to Jon Cane who excavated the site, and most especially to Charlotte Cane who first appreciated the significance of the assemblage and who initiated the work on this group. The material is deposited at the City Museum & Art Gallery, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent.

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Plate 1. Tin-glazed earthenware plate with blue-painted decoration (No. 47)



Plate 2. Westerwald salt-glazed stoneware tankard with applied decoration and coloured in blue (No. 85)

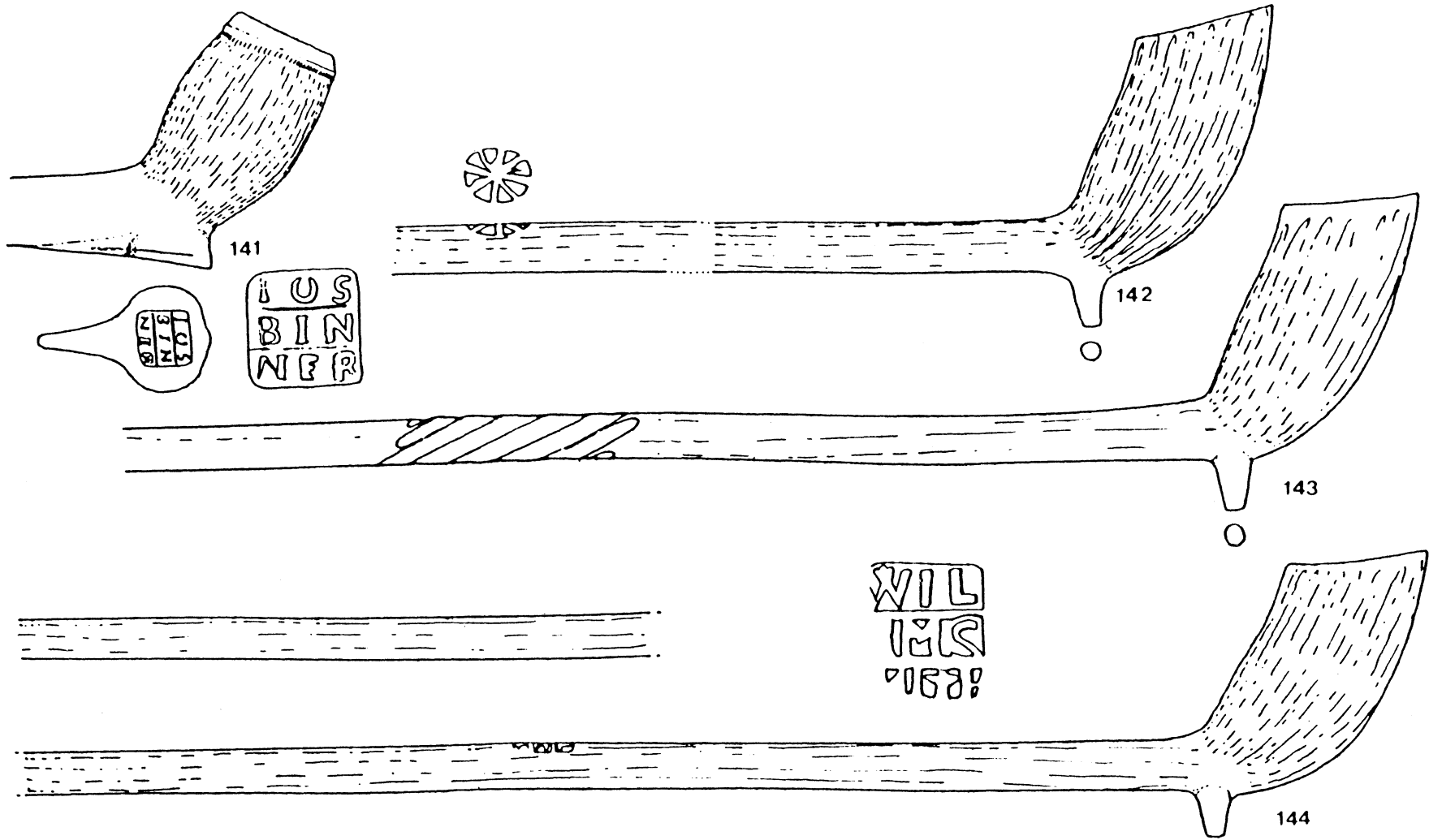


FIGURE 13 CLAY TOBACCO PIPES

Scale 1:1

DH

EDV
DEA
GON

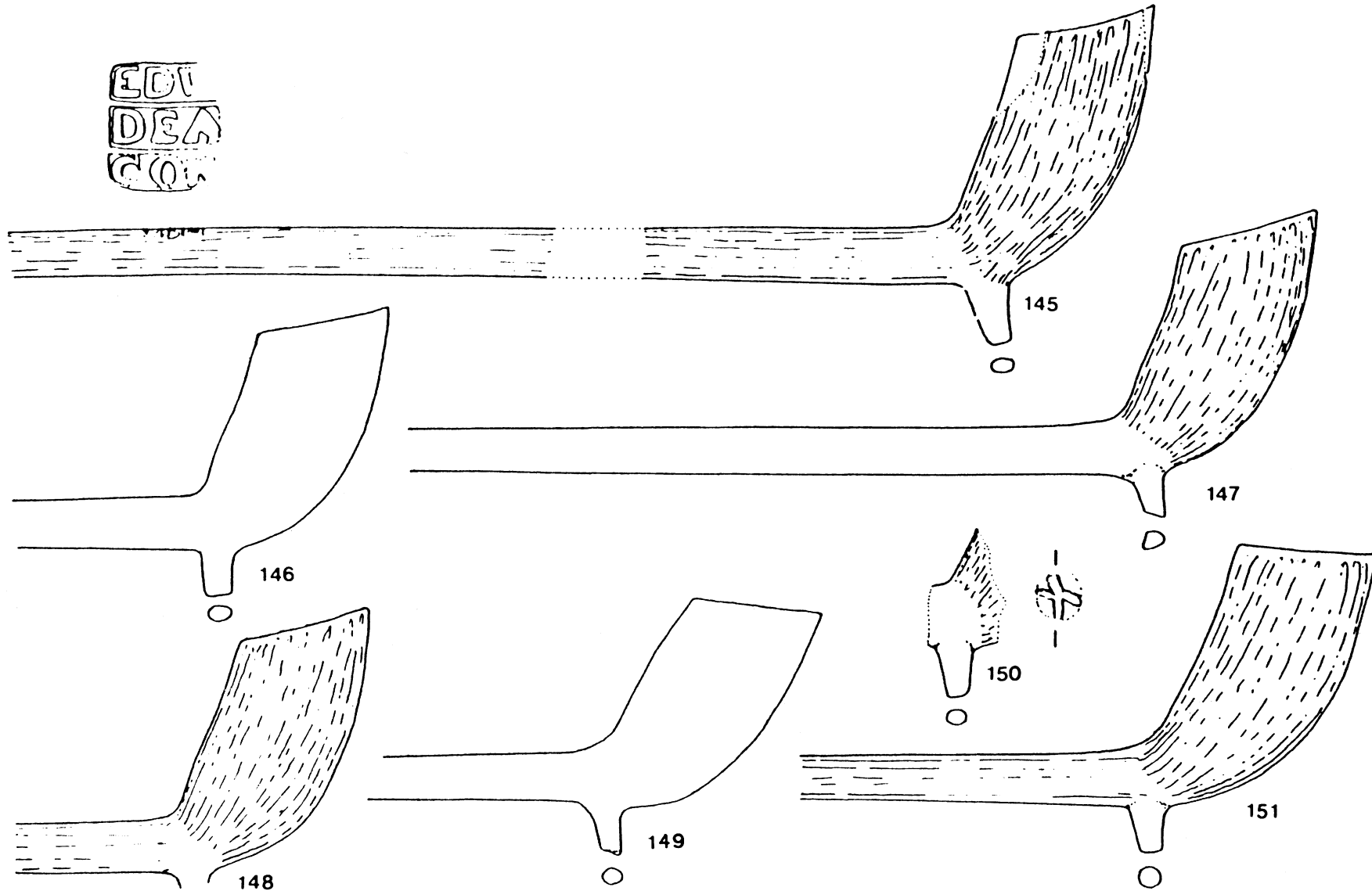


FIGURE 14 CLAY TOBACCO PIPES
Scale 1:1