



39 Brown Street Salisbury, Wiltshire

Archaeological Excavation

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Trust for Wessex Archaeology Site W139: 39 BROWN STREET

by J.M. Mills

INTRODUCTION

Excavations were carried out in advance of redevelopment of 31-39 Brown Street (SU 1463 2984). As time and resources did not allow investigation of the whole of the development area it was decided that excavations should concentrate on a single property, no. 39, which, along with its pair no. 37, was surveyed by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (1980, 112) prior to demolition in 1965. This southern part of the site had subsequently been used as a car park and was considered likely to be in a better state of preservation than the rest of the site.

During demolition of 31-35 Brown Street it was noted that the concrete base of the building reached depths in excess of 1m below street level, and it was likely that much of the archaeological stratigraphy in these areas had been severely depleted. The only features noted during the observation of the demolition and clearance were one chalk-lined and two brick-lined wells (planned on archive drawing 1).

Precise location of the trench was determined by the extent of demolition activities taking place adjacent to the excavation, and by an 11kV electricity cable crossing the rear half of the site. Despite these restrictions, it proved possible to excavate almost the complete width of the property, although not the full depth from the street frontage. The trench 15m X 7m with an extension to the east of 5m X 3m covered approximately 5% of the total development area.

Excavation Design and Method

The tarmac surface of the car park, hoggin make-up and consolidated rubble from the 1965 demolition were removed by mechanical excavator to a level of c46.0m OD, all excavation below this level being by manual methods. The whole area was excavated down to the earliest structural phase; excavations down to natural clays overlying gravel were carried out in a 1m wide slot along the street frontage and in the extreme east of the trench. The general survival of deposits was good, although the 1965 demolition had evidently resulted in the removal of the later levels from the middle of the site making it difficult to identify elements of the building surveyed by the Royal Commission. The 19th century passageway between nos. 37 and 39, originally included within the excavation area, were disturbed by the insertion of three brick inspection chambers and service conduits, and this area was excavated only to a depth sufficient to expose the northern external wall of no. 39. Brick additions to the structure had also removed all traces of medieval stratigraphy in areas of the east of the trench. The need to respect the highway frontage and the adjacent property boundary resulted in the southern and western external walls lying outside the excavation, although the loss in both directions is unlikely to have been more than 1.5m.

Soil samples for environmental analysis were taken from the pre-urban levels (see report

below), and samples for 1mm sieving were taken from features and floor layers seen to contain small animal bones. Mortar samples were taken from all walls of assumed medieval date.

The Excavated Sequence

Extended descriptions of the excavated sequence, stratigraphic matrixes, plans and sections are held in archive (see index section below). The phase numbering is exclusive to this site and does not correspond to phasing on the Gigant Street car park site. The pottery has been scanned and the dating implications are incorporated in the phase descriptions below.

Phase 1: Pre-urban deposits of clay overlying gravel. Four sherds of mid-13th century pottery and a fragment of glazed floor tile from these levels may derive from overlying deposits.

Phase 2: The first structural phase is represented by the northern external wall [127/267] of flint, tile and mortar with no evidence for a construction trench. Differences in the detail of coursing and alignment between [127] and [267] suggest that two separate phases of construction may be represented, although the stratigraphic relationships between the walls and the internal deposits do not indicate any chronological differentiation; it is possible that later underpinning and reconstruction could have been carried out from the exterior of the building. The southern and western walls are presumed to lie immediately beyond the trench on the boundaries of the site, thus defining a building at least 6m wide. No evidence for the easternmost extent of the building was recovered. It is assumed that the building would have been of timber construction, the wooden framework resting on dwarf masonry walls. Two sub-phases are identified:

Phase 2a: Within the basic phase 2 building a flint and mortar wall with a herringbone-coursed tile top course [199/200] formed a north south internal division of slighter build than the external wall. A series of build up layers within the building contained only one identifiable compacted chalk floor; pottery from these layers suggests a later 13th or 14th century date.

Phase 2b: A series of spreads and discontinuous floor layers overlying the internal wall [199/200] contained pottery of 14th or 15th century date. Floor [233], early within this phase, contained a silver penny of Edward I or Edward II likely to have been deposited in the first half of the 14th century. No other internal divisions were recovered which could be shown to date to this phase. In the south eastern part of the building a series of twenty stakeholes were excavated, containing quantities of fish and animal bone fragments. No other evidence for the function of these stakeholes was found.

Phase 3: A major rebuilding is suggested by the insertion of a new northern external wall [8/34] immediately to the north of [127/267]. The length of wall numbered [34] survived only as a clay and tile foundation. Wall [60] is likely to have been the eastern external wall, thus defining a building at least 10 X 6m. Two sub-phases are identified:

Phase 3a: Internal north-south [57/95] and east-west [27] walls divided the building. Unlike

the external walls and internal walls of other phases, construction trenches were present, and these produced pottery of 15th or 16th century date. Greensand blocks within walls [8], [34], [60] and [95] may have been intended to reinforce points of particular stress imposed by the load presented by the timber framework. There was no evidence for any doorways connecting individual bays. Within the floor/build-up levels small, shallow scoops containing fish and animal bone fragments were the only features.

Phase 3b: An additional north-south division [113/274] parallel to and 2m south of wall [27] was inserted during this phase. A shallow, linear feature [130] running parallel to wall [95] and filled with a sandy mortar with lumps of plaster is of unknown function. A peg-tile hearth [128] was inserted. Pottery from layers associated with this phase suggest a 16th or early 17th century date.

Phase 4: Further sub-division of the frontage room and the replacement of the peg tile hearth was associated with a group of twenty stakeholes cutting an ashy, organic spread [96] containing abundant quantities of fishbones. It is tentatively suggested that these features may represent an activity such as fish- smoking. Pottery suggests a late 16th or early 17th century date.

Phase 5: Additions to the eastern end of the building may be the construction of the service wing recorded by the RCHM survey and dated by them to the 16th century (this evidence included in the illustration). There is evidence of further internal rearrangement. Levels relating to this phase had been disturbed by demolition work of 1965, and the pottery recovered cannot be regarded as secure from intrusions.

Phase 6: 18th century rebuilding in brick; additional 18th century evidence from the RCHM survey is included.



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