



# Oswestry Castle 2017

## Pottery Assessment Report

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An Assessment Report on

# **Pottery Recovered from Excavations at Oswestry Castle During 2017, Oswestry, Shropshire.**

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## **Non-Technical Summary**

This report details the assessment of the pottery archive from excavations at Oswestry Castle, Oswestry, Shropshire, which was undertaken during 2016 and 2017 by the Oswestry Castle Community Research Project (OCCRP). The pottery archived has been assessed and dated between Late Medieval to Early Post-Medieval period.

The assessment has provided a chronology for the structural narrative of the site; however the assemblage is not considered to be of high enough quality to lend itself to more than basic scrutiny.

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## 1. Introduction and Methodology

This report details the assessment of the pottery archive for excavations at Oswestry Castle, Oswestry, Shropshire, which was undertaken in 2016 and 2017, by Oswestry Castle Research Project (OCRS). Pottery artefacts of Medieval and Early Post-Medieval date have been identified in the assemblage.

The pottery has been fully catalogued to a level and standard that is in keeping with recommendations made by the Medieval Pottery Research Group (Slowikowski, Nenk & Pearce, 2001); and assessed in accordance with recommendations by English Heritage (1991).

All the pottery was examined macroscopically and where necessary using a binocular microscope (x20) and was also separated by ware type within each context. Sherds from each different vessel were then recorded individually by sherd count and weight on an Excel spreadsheet. All measurable rim and base sherds were recorded by diameter and percentage present in order to provide data to calculate the estimated vessel equivalents (EVEs) for the assemblage.

The finds were briefly considered in relation to the stratigraphy, as understood from the site matrices, and with reference to other sites in the general area.

## 2. Medieval Pottery

A full catalogue of the Medieval pottery has been created on an Excel spreadsheet and will form part of the digital site archive. A key to the ware type series is in Section 8.2.

### 2.2 The Medieval Pottery (13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> Century)

A total of 146 sherds of Medieval pottery with a combined weight of 2.590 kilograms were identified in the ceramic assemblage and details of this are summarised in table 1. This material was recovered from within excavation trenches 5 and 6. The primary function of the material is in being able to suggest a chronology for the structural narrative of the site as it is too small to lend itself to other statistical analysis.

The bulk of the assemblage consisted of Late Medieval Orange Wares (115 sherds, weighing 1.952 Kg), an external lead or olive green glaze was present on some sherds, no other form of decoration was identified on any sherds. (Fig. 1) These were found predominantly in contexts (6010) and (6023), with several sherds in (5511) (6026) and (6031), dating to the late 14th to 15th century. Rim diameter ranged from 60mm to 70mm, with an EVE of 0.41, Vessel types include jugs, with evidence of spouts and looped strap handles, however, jars are also likely present.

A semi-complete jug was present from (6010), with internal and external green glaze, with a pinched spout, potentially conical in shape and showing evidence of wheel thrown production.

The complete base of a baluster jug was identified from context (6031), with a diameter of 45mm, no glaze or decoration was present. (Fig. 2)



Figure 1: Late Medieval Orange Ware



Figure 2: Baluster Jug Base

Iron Rich Sandy Wares (19 sherds, weighing 350 g) were also present in the assemblage, many decorated with an external lead glazing and dating to the 11th to 14th centuries. (**Fig. 3**). Rim diameter ranged from 60mm to 110mm, with an EVE of 0.55, vessel types were jugs and cooking jars. Context (5004) produced three sherds with incised and impressed wavy-line decoration, a single fragment from (6010) also showed evidence of wavy incised decoration. A jug rim sherd from context (5004) had evidence for stamped/rusticated decoration beneath the glaze and a fragment of base retrieved from (5502) was decorated with thumb impressions.

A single sherd of Gritty ware from context (6010) was identified within the assemblage (weighing 19 g). The sherd was part of the rim to a jug with an external red/brown slip but no evidence of a glaze with an EVE of 0.15. (**Fig. 4**).



**Figure 3: Iron Rich Sandy Ware**



**Figure 4: Gritty Ware**

The assemblage also contained 8 sherds of Midlands Purple Ware (weighing 269g) dating to the late 14th to 16th century. Sherds from a semi-complete vessel of a possible jug were identified in (6010), with a partial rim of 50mm and looped strapped handle; as well as, a base from a possible flat bottom jug in (6023) with an EVE of 0.25.

No continental imports were identified in the Medieval pottery assemblage.

The Medieval pottery assemblage from the Oswestry Castle excavations can be seen as typical of material recovered from Medieval deposits in Shropshire. The material from Trench 5 and Trench 6 probably represents domestic cooking and drinking vessels. It does not greatly enhance our understanding of the status of the castle but does provide interesting snap-shots in to the lives of the occupants. The primary function of the assemblage is to provide a chronology for the structural sequence encountered on the site. It should be retained as part of the permanent site archive.

Table 1: Medieval Context, Fabric, Sherd and Weight

Context No	Fabric	Sherd	Weight (g)
5511	LMOW	1	5
6010	LMOW	44	1852
6023	LMOW	110	2720
6026	LMOW	1	23
6031	LMOW	3	192
5004	IRSW	7	116
5006	IRSW	1	41
5502	IRSW	1	17
6003	IRSW	1	11
6010	IRSW	5	82
6023	IRSW	2	18
6031	IRSW?	4	65
6023	MIDP	2	36
6010	MIDP	6	233
6010	GRITTY	1	19

### 3. Post Medieval Pottery

A full catalogue of the early Post-Medieval pottery has been created on an Excel spreadsheet and will form part of the digital site archive. A key to the fabric type series is in Section 8.

#### 3.2 The Post Medieval Pottery (15th to 19th century)

A total of 172 sherds of post-medieval pottery with a combined weight of 4.548 kilograms were identified in the ceramic assemblage and details of this are summarised in table 2. This material was recovered from within excavation trenches 5 and 6. The primary function of the material is in being able to suggest a chronology for the structural narrative of the site as it is too small to lend itself to other statistical analysis.

The bulk of the assemblage consisted of Glazed Red Earthenware (96 sherds, weighing 2.456 Kg). Sherds were glazed both internally and externally, with vessels identified as cisterns, jugs and jars. Rim diameter ranged between 55mm and 150mm with an EVE of 1.47.

A semi-complete Jug was identified within context (6010), with external glaze, a pinched lip and a diameter of 55mm.

Within this context were also: a decorated rim from a cistern with an applied strip and thumb detail, its diameter is 100mm (**Fig. 5**); a bung hole from a cistern was also present with profile of the base, which had a diameter of 75mm. The pot was glazed internally, the bung hole has a square profile with no added decoration (**Fig. 6**).



**Figure 5: Decorated Cistern Rim**



**Figure 6: Cistern sherd with Bunghole**

The next largest fabric type was of Cistercian Ware (64 sherds, weighing 489g) with internal and external brown glaze dating to the late 15th to 17th century. The majority of the sherds were from drinking cups; the rim diameter ranged between 45mm and 60mm, with an EVE of 1.00. (Fig. 7).

These were predominantly recovered from context (6010) with 4 sherds from (6016). Evidence of missing handles in the form of handle scars and handle sherds were identified; one sherd showed evidence of at least two vertical handles.

A single body sherd of decorated Cistercian Ware was noted, with a single white clay pellet applied to the surface and stamped with a rosette design. (Fig. 8).

A single body sherd of a Reverse Cistercian Ware cup was identified (weighing 7g), dating to the late 15th to 17th century.



**Figure 7: Cistercian Ware**



**Figure 8: Decorated Cistercian Ware**



A single rim sherd of creamware fineware (weighing 3g) was identified in context (6003), with an external glaze dating c.1750+; believed to represent residual material.

Continental imports of German Stone Ware (2 sherds, weighing 51g) were identified within the assemblage both from context (6010) and dating to the late 15th/16th century. The first was a body sherd possibly from a drinking jug in a possible Aachen fabric (**Fig. 9**); the second was a rim and handle sherd from a drinking jug in a possible Raeren fabric.

The Post-Medieval pottery assemblage from the Oswestry Castle excavations can be seen as typical of material recovered from early Post-Medieval deposits in Shropshire. The material from Trench 5 and 6 represents domestic drinking and storage vessels. Remains of German Stoneware show evidence of trade with the continent and are relatively rare in assemblages of this period in Shropshire. It does not greatly enhance our understanding of the status of the castle, but rather illustrates a glimpse in to the lives of its occupants. The primary function of the assemblage is to provide a chronology for the structural sequence encountered on the site. It should be retained as part of the permanent site archive.



**Figure 9: German Stoneware**

Table 2: Post-Medieval Context, Fabric, Sherd and Weight

Context No	Fabric	Sherd	Weight (g)
6010	CISTW	60	480
6016	CISTW	4	9
6010	RCISTW	1	7
5006	GRE	1	1
6003	GRE	3	72
6010	GRE	90	3631
6016	GRE	1	17
6026	GRE	1	8
6010	GERMST	2	51
6003	CREAM	1	3

## 4. Potential

In general the pottery assemblage has limited potential for further analysis. The Medieval and early Post-Medieval pottery assemblages are of some interest, as they provide a chronological framework for the structural narrative of the site. At present it forms the only pottery assemblage for the castle. The assemblage does contribute to our understanding of Oswestry Castle, as it supports known dates for the occupation of the site and highlights the daily activities of its occupants.

There is potential for further study of the Medieval pottery assemblage in order to identify sources of manufacture; in particular for the Gritty Ware rim sherd. Reference to any available regional fabric type series could enhance the potential of the assemblage to provide insights regarding trade links for the castle. Comparison with any other published assemblages from the area may also provide further insights in to the status of the castle occupants.

A selection of the pottery should be illustrated as part of any publication on the results of the excavations.

## 5. Significance of the data

The Medieval and Post-Medieval assemblage is generally of local significance with a lot of the material being fragmentary; though some semi-complete vessels are present. It can be seen as typical of material recovered from deposits of these periods within the Shropshire area.

However, at present it forms the only pottery assemblage for the Oswestry Castle site which adds greatly to its significance.

## 6. Revised Research Aims

Medieval: There is potential for further research of the Medieval pottery assemblage in order to identify sources of manufacture; in particular for the Gritty Ware rim sherd. Reference to any available regional fabric type series could enhance the potential of the assemblage to provide insights regarding trade links for the castle. Comparison with any other published assemblages from the Shropshire area may also provide further insights in to the status of the castle occupants.

Post-Medieval: Research to confirm the origin of the two imported German stoneware vessels would further enhance our understanding of trade links between Oswestry Castle and the continent during the early Post-Medieval period.

## 7. Bibliography

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