

4. Excavations at Prescott, December 1980-January 1981

(Sites A-E)

R. Holgate

The Finds

Pottery

D.J. Freke

The pottery was analysed into fabric and form types for each context and quantified by weighing, sherd counts, minimum number counts and vessel equivalent (rim proportion) counts. These figures are lodged as an archive with the material and only conclusions are presented here, except for the kiln waster groups which are discussed in more detail. The results are considered by site.

The post-medieval fabric type series was based on that established for the analysis of the South Castle Street (1976) excavations by P.J. Davey, to whom I am grateful for advice in identifying the post-medieval groups.

Introduction

In 1979, Knowsley Borough Council proposed an Action Area Plan for the rejuvenation of Prescott (Knowsley Borough Council 1979), which revolved around the construction of a large shopping centre between Eccleston Street and Kemble Street. Following the archaeological and historical survey of the town (Davey 1978a), the Liverpool University Rescue Archaeology Unit considered it necessary to carry out trial excavations in Prescott to assess its archaeological heritage. Five derelict sites, three of which await redevelopment, were selected for this purpose (Fig. 1.3). Trenches were dug on each site over a five-week period from early December 1980 to mid-January 1981 with the financial assistance of a grant from the Department of the Environment.

The Excavations

The location of the sites investigated is shown in Figure 1.3; Figures 4.1 - 4.5 summarise the contexts encountered at each site. Three sites examined the back of later medieval burgage plots; two, the front. Post-medieval cellar construction had destroyed all street front structures, but garden deposits containing medieval pottery (including wasters and daub at site D) were recovered, as were quantities of post-medieval pottery produced in the town's 18th and 19th century potteries. Detailed reports on each site are contained in the archive.

Medieval fabrics

2 Sandy inclusions no larger than 0.25mm unglazed.

2g Sandy inclusions no larger than 0.25mm glazed.

3 Sandy inclusions no larger than 0.5mm unglazed.

3g Sandy inclusions no larger than 0.5mm glazed.

4 Sandy inclusions no larger than 1.00mm unglazed.

6 Creamy fabric, unglazed.

7 Salmon pink fabric.

Site A

All contexts contained 18th and 19th century types. The saggars and stilts found in such mixed layers of this date in Prescott can only be interpreted as demonstrating the presence of kilns somewhere in the town.

Site B

Context 12 contained two seconds or possibly wasters of off-white salt glazed stoneware and white salt glazed stoneware, which supports the suggestion that these types were being produced in the town (Smith A. n.d.). This context also produced a considerable quantity of late medieval sherds, none showing any sign of being seconds or wasters although most are comparable in fabric to wasters found on Site D (below). One was a creamy fabric, and another a salmon pink type; the rest were oxidised or reduced sandy wares. Context 24 contained only medieval pottery, though very little (Fig. 4.7, nos. 54-64).

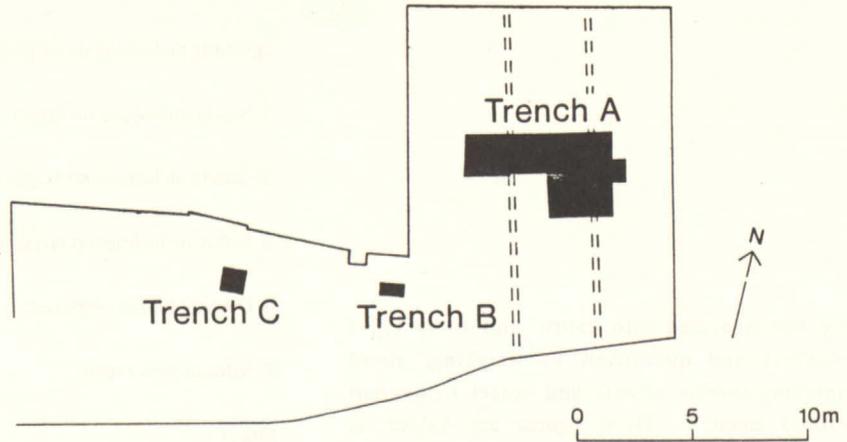
Site C

In the levelling-up material were many wasters of mottled ware and of black-glazed earthenware both fine and coarse, together with saggars, but this material was presumably brought in from nearby as hard-core to level the area for the bowling green. All the wasters are illustrated together with rims and bases of the same fabrics (Figs. 4.6 and 4.7, nos. 18-36) to show the range of forms. A small number of medieval sherds were also recovered from the lowest contexts of this trench.

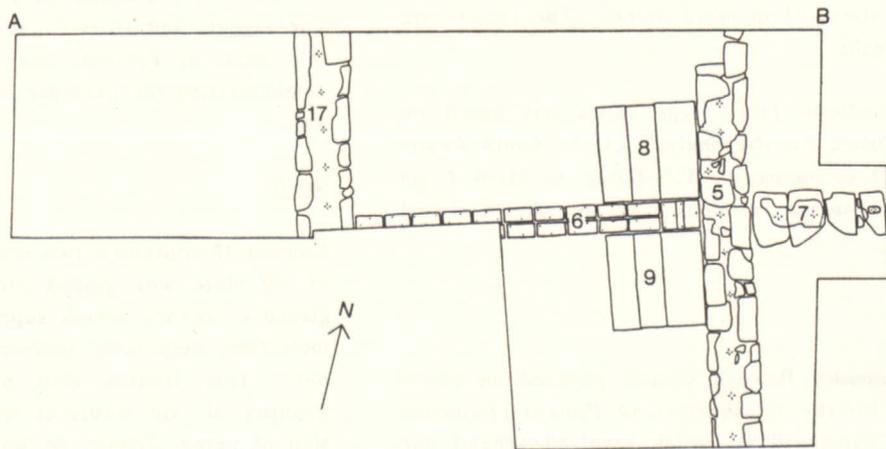
Site D

The most significant group from this site was the sealed group of medieval sherds from context 6. Out of a total of 399 sherds of fabrics 3 and 3g (minimum number of vessels 19), 74 were considered to be from wasters. Ten of these were glazed over a crack, two

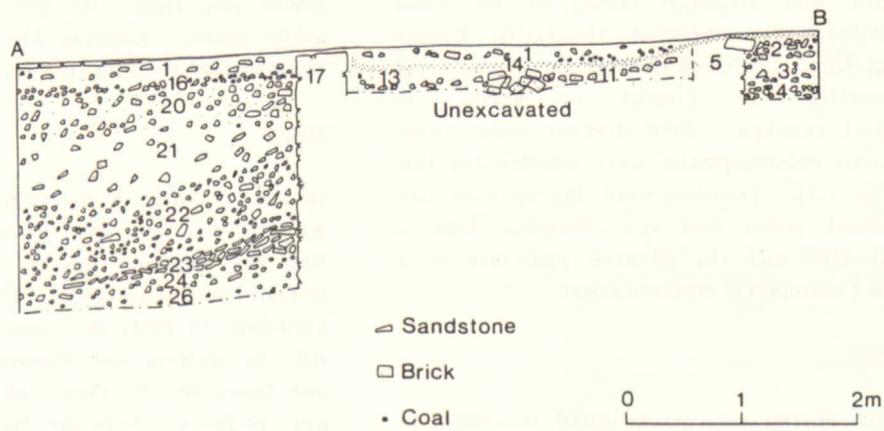
SITE A
PLAN OF SITE



Trench A



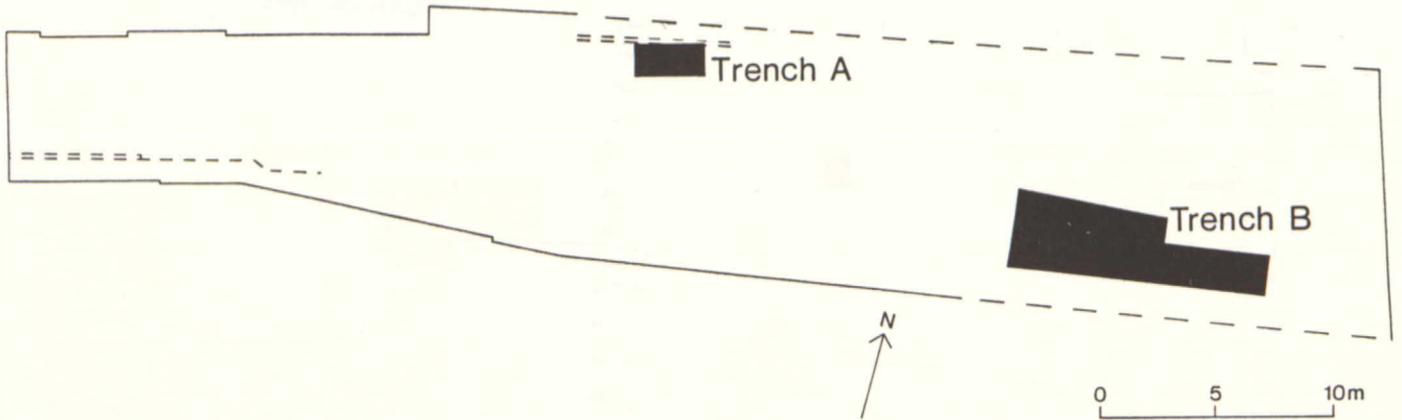
Trench A - sections



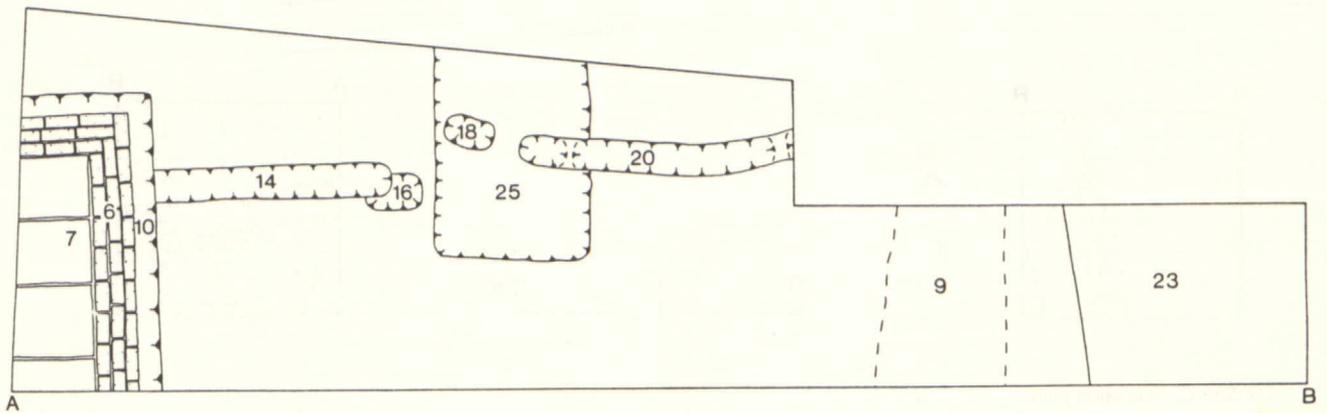
4.1 Site A. Location plan of trenches A, B and C; Trench A. Section

SITE B

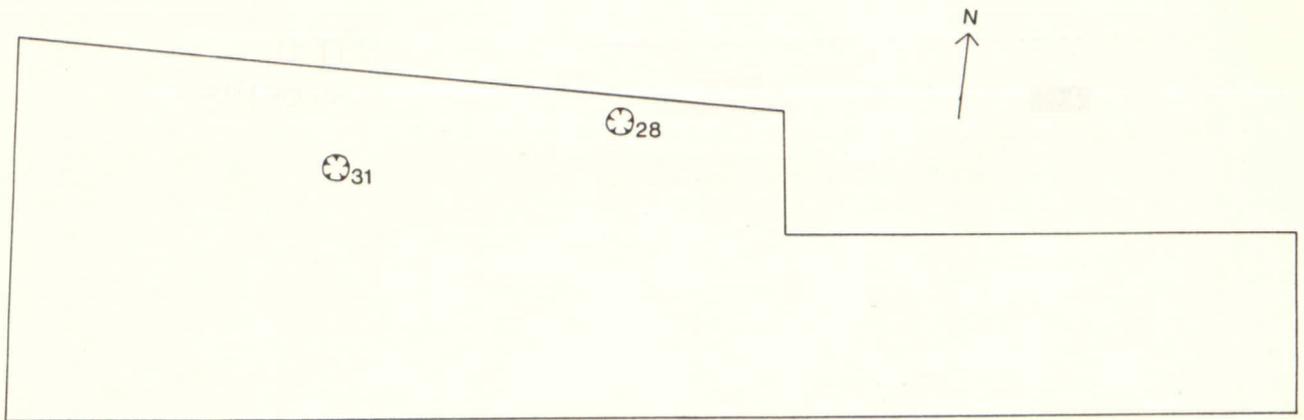
PLAN OF SITE



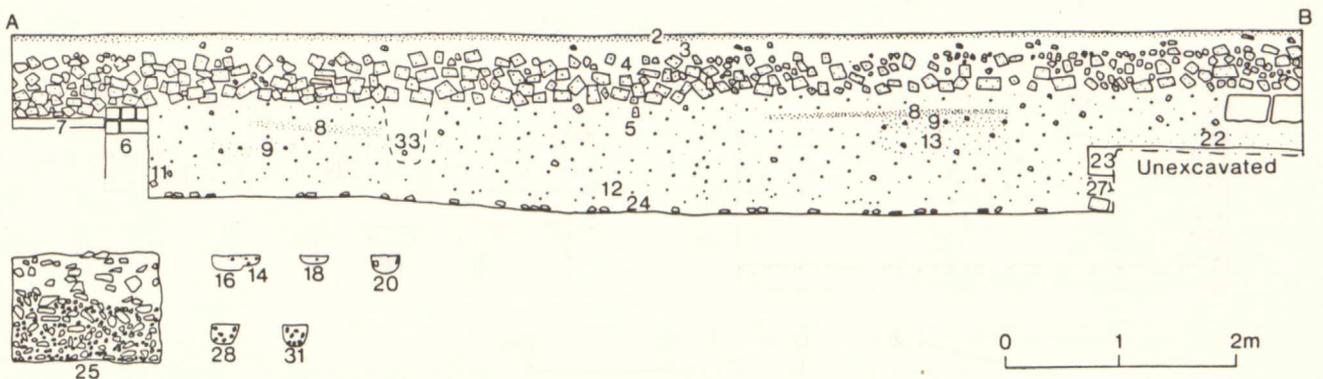
Trench B - 18th & 19th century contexts



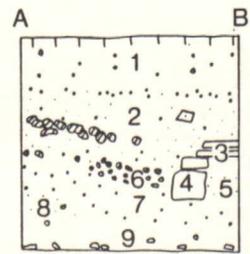
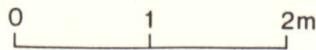
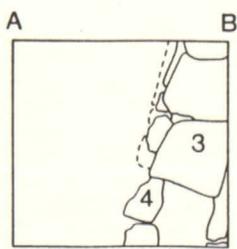
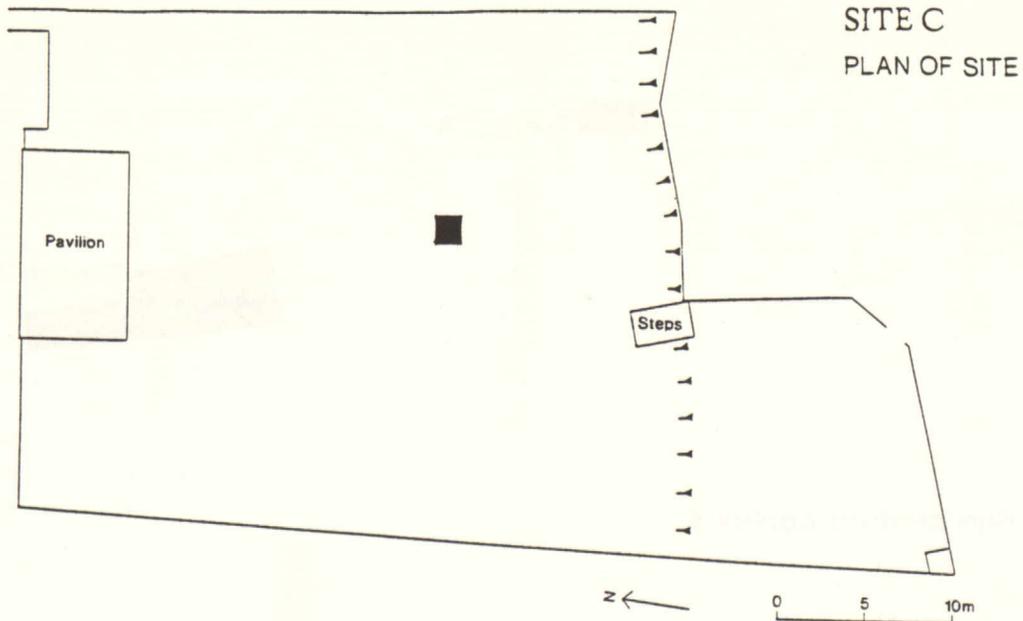
Trench B - later medieval contexts



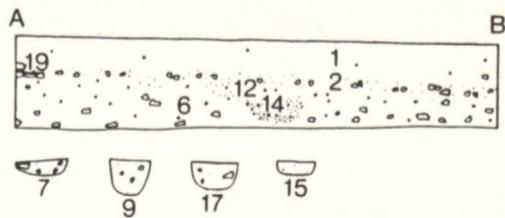
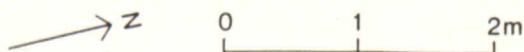
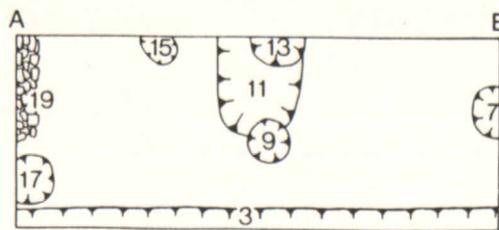
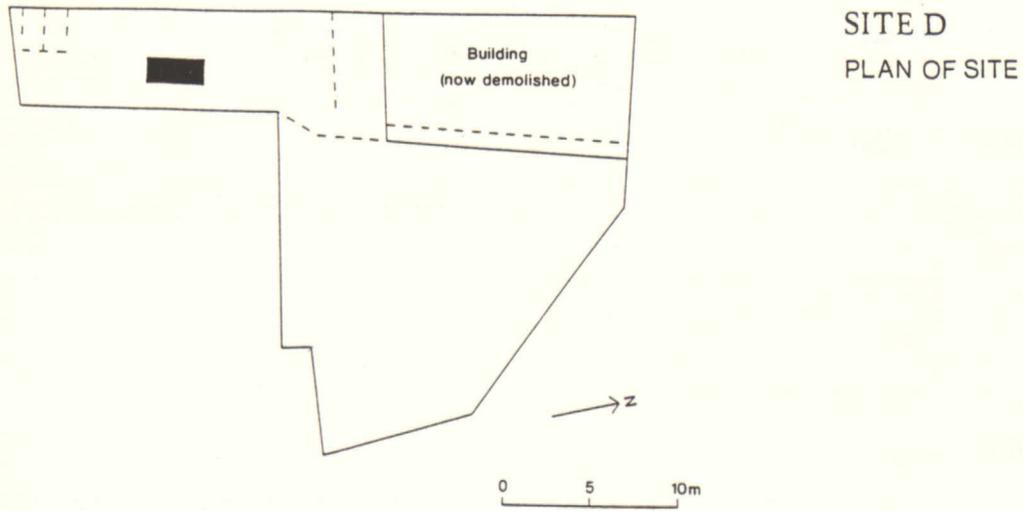
Trench B - sections



4.2 Site B. Location plan of trenches A and B; Trench B. Context plans and section

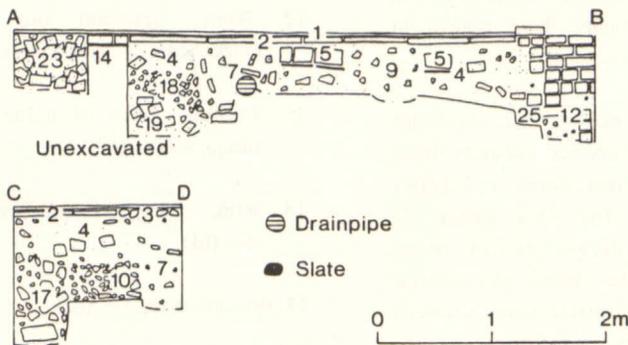
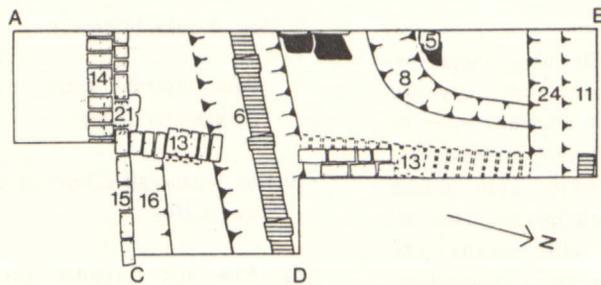
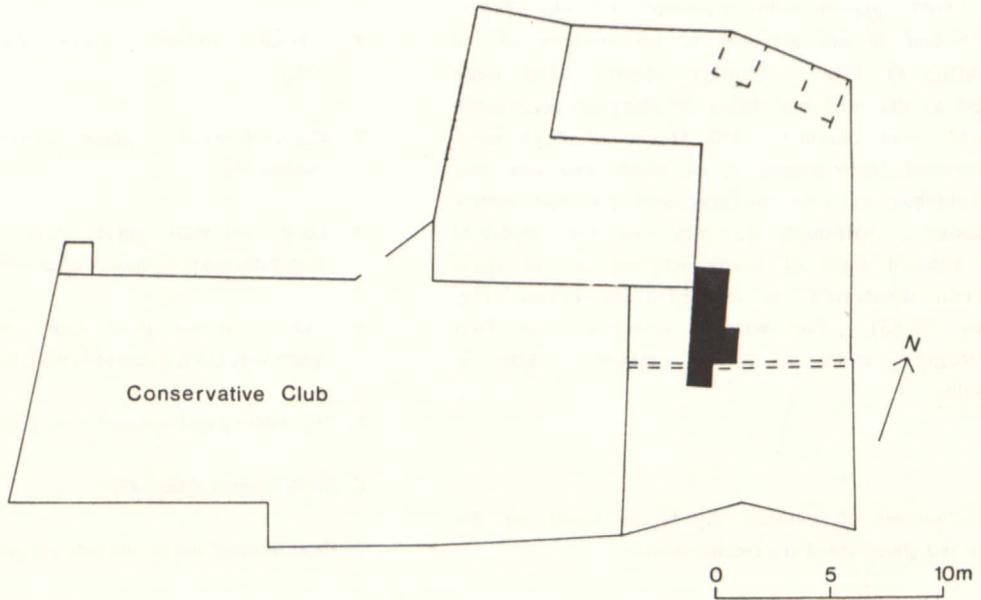


4.3 Site C. Location plan



4.4 Site D. Location plan

SITE E
PLAN OF SITE



4.5 Site E. Location plan

had unvitriified glazes and the remainder showed differentially oxidised crack surfaces. This feature only occurs on pottery from kiln sites and is presumably caused by a crack in the vessel opening during firing allowing the normally reduced core to oxidise. At the 16th century kiln in Lower Parrock, Sussex, this fault accounted for 12% of all faults (Freke 1979, 110-111). The proportion here of cracks, both glazed and oxidised (if the fabric groups 3 and 3g are assumed to be products of the same kiln) is 19%. Similar effects have been observed at the medieval kilns at Ringmer in Sussex (Hadfield, pers. comm.). 132 pieces of daub were also recovered from context 6, of which two had lead glaze splashes on one surface and six had wattle impressions. Although no rims in the medieval fabrics showed signs of being wasters, all of them have been illustrated, as a significant group (Fig. 4.7, nos. 37-53). The wasters constitute the first archaeological evidence for a medieval kiln in Merseyside.

Site E

A small number of medieval sherds as found on this site. One is a glazed sherd in a creamy fabric.

Conclusions

These excavations have hinted at the range of Prescott's post-medieval and medieval ceramic industries. Although there is now evidence that in the post-medieval period black-glazed earthenware, mottled ware and a form of white salt glazed earthenware were all being produced in the town, an adequate study of this activity still awaits the thorough investigation of the kiln sites themselves. Several other centres in the region were producing similar wares, for example Liverpool, Rainford and Buckley, and further work may enable these centres to be distinguished, and their market areas isolated.

The medieval kiln debris from D extends our knowledge of Prescott's involvement in the ceramic industry back to the later medieval period. Firm dates and fuller details of forms and fabrics for this phase of Prescott's industry await the excavation of more securely dated sites, ideally the kilns themselves. This is the first medieval kiln material from between the Mersey and the Lune and is important for the light it throws not only on Prescott's development but also on the ceramic industry of the north-west (Davey 1977, 5).

Description of illustrated sherds

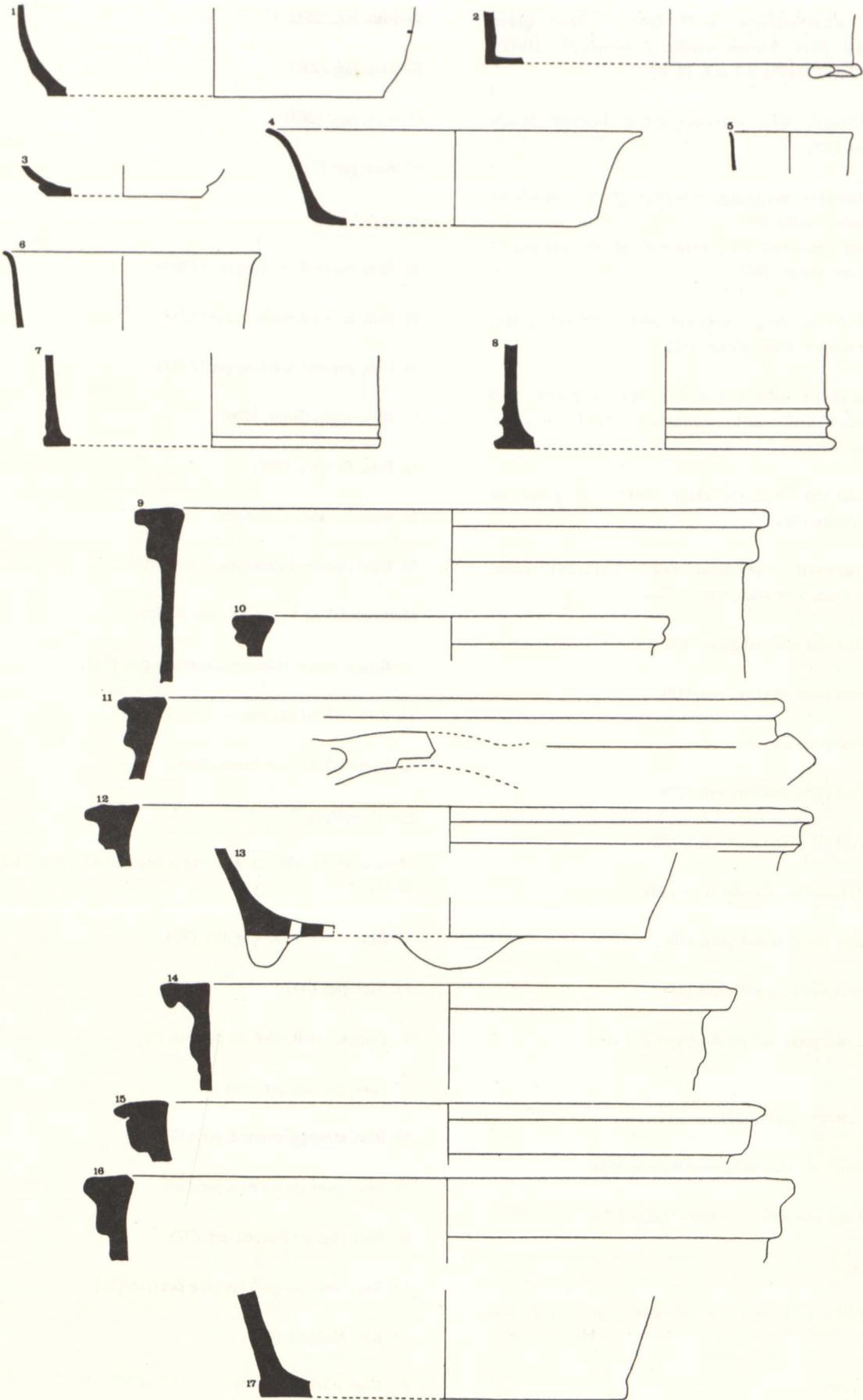
Site C, context 2

Fabric 2. Earthenware, red-bodied, black-glazed, fine (Fig. 4.6, nos. 1-7) (numbers in brackets refer to archive drawings).

1. Base, internal glaze, glaze in crack, waster. (50)
2. Base, internal glaze, separator stuck to base, waster. (52)
3. Base, internal glaze, glaze very thick, plucked separator mark on base, waster. (55)
4. Dish, internal glaze and over rim, plucked rim, glaze very thick, oxidised breaks, waster. (45)
5. Cup, internal and external glaze. (222)
6. Bowl, internal glaze. (47)
7. Base, internal and partial external glaze. (57)

Fabric 3. Earthenware, red-bodied, black-glazed, coarse (Fig. 4.6, nos. 8-17).

8. Base of tankard (turned).
9. Rim, internal glaze, scars on rim and plucked glaze, waster? (58)
10. Rim, internal glaze, external unvitriified glaze, waster. (60)
11. Rim and handle, internal and external glaze, plucked rim, waster. (64)
12. Rim, internal and external glaze, glaze in cracks, scars on body, waster. (65)
13. Footed base of colander, internal glaze, badly fitting, waster. (67)
14. Rim, internal and external glaze, except over rim. (61)
15. Rim, internal glaze. (62)
16. Rim, internal and external glaze, except over rim. (63)
17. Base, internal and partial external glaze. (66)



4.6 Pottery Site C. Nos. 1-17. Scale: x1/4

Fabric 5. Earthenware, buff fabric, clear glaze streaked with dark brown stains ("mottled", Davey 1975, Fig. nos. 3 and 4) (Fig. 4.7, nos. 18-36).

18. Base, globular mug, internal glaze, bottom fallen out, waster. (83)
19. Base, globular mug/jug, internal glaze, separator stuck to base, waster. (85)
20. Base, jug, internal and external glaze, separator stuck to base, waster. (84)
21. Base, globular mug, internal and external glaze, separator stuck to base, waster. (82)
22. Base, tankard, internal and external glaze, scar and piece of pot adhering near bottom, waster/second. (79)
23. Base, tankard, internal glaze, debris in glaze on bottom, waster. (78)
24. Base, tankard, internal and external glaze, separator stuck to bottom, waster. (78)
25. Rim, internal and external glaze. (69)
26. Rim, internal glaze and over rim. (72)
27. Rim, internal glaze and over rim. (71)
28. Rim, internal glaze and over rim. (73)
29. Rim, internal glaze and over rim. (108)
30. Rim with lid seating, internal glaze. (74)
31. Rim, internal and external glaze. (109)
32. Rim, internal and external glaze. (75)
33. Plate, internal glaze and patchy external glaze. (70)
34. Base, jug, internal glaze. (81)
35. Base, tankard, internal and external glaze. (80)
36. Base, tankard, internal and external glaze. (77)

Site D, context 6

Medieval fabrics 3 and 3g (glazed) (Fig. 4.7, nos. 37-50).

37. Rim, jug. (207)
38. Rim, jug. (210)

39. Rim, jug. (211)

40. Rim, jug. (204)

41. Rim, jug? (203)

42. Rim, jug. (212)

43. Rim. (209)

44. Rim, everted, cooking pot? (200)

45. Rim, everted, cooking pot? (213)

46. Rim, everted, cooking pot? (201)

47. Rim, slight flange. (206)

48. Rim, flanged. (208)

49. Rim, hooked, cooking pot? (205)

50. Rim, thumb decoration, jar? (214)

Medieval fabric 4 (Fig. 4.7, nos. 51-53).

51. Rim, everted, thickened, cooking pot. (215)

52. Rim with lid seating, cooking pot. (217)

53. Rim with internal bevel. (216)

Site B, context 12

Medieval fabrics 3 and 3g (unglazed) (Fig. 4.7, nos. 54-64).

54. Rim with handle scar, jug. (53)

55. Rim, jug. (44)

56. Rim, everted, cooking pot/jar. (36)

57. Rim, everted, jar. (40)

58. Rim, strongly everted, jar. (38)

59. Rim, strongly everted, jar. (39)

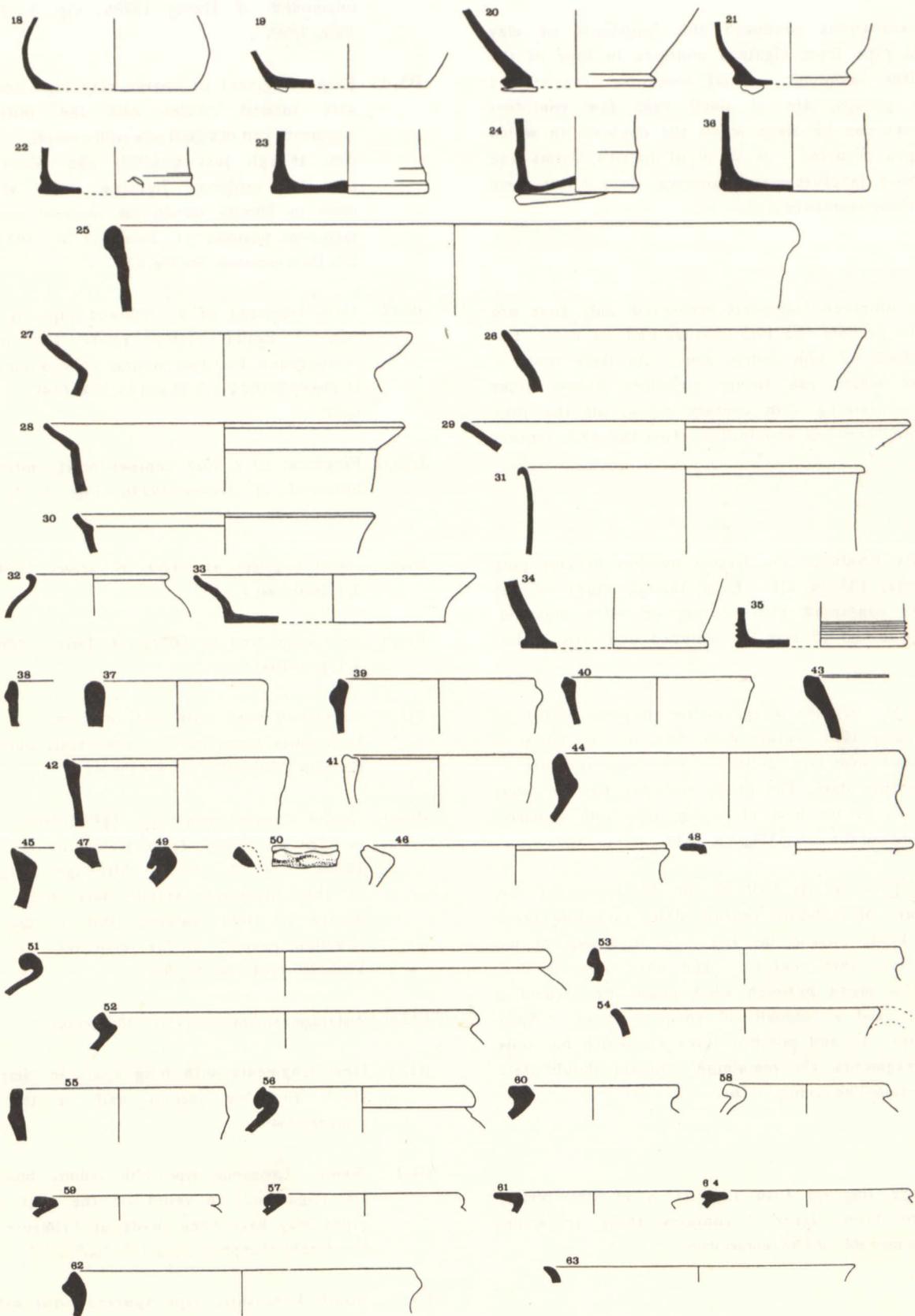
60. Rim, slightly flanged, jar. (37)

61. Rim, wide flanged, cooking pot/jar. (41)

62. Rim, flanged. (48)

63. Rim, thickened. (49)

64. Rim, thickened, everted. (53)



4.7 Pottery Site C, D and B. Nos. 18-64. Scale: x1/4

Clay Pipes (Fig. 4.8)

P.J. Davey

The excavations produced 162 fragments of clay tobacco pipe from eighteen contexts in four of the five sites examined. Total numbers, even in the largest groups, are so small that few confident assertions can be made about the contexts in which the pipes occurred. A study of fabrics, forms and stem bore measurements, however, does allow some minimal statements to be made.

Site A

Of the nineteen fragments recovered only four are likely to predate the 19th century and, of these, two are probably of 17th century date. As these occur in contexts which are firmly stratified above other layers containing 19th century pipes, all the pipe containing contexts should date from the 19th century or later.

Site B

This site produced the largest number of clay pipe fragments, 135 in all. Even though many of the contexts contained 19th century or later material, the two lowest (5 and 12) included distinctly earlier pipes.

Context 5 - Of the 49 pieces the majority appear to be of early 19th century date, but, on the basis of fabric and bore size, at least seven fragments are of 17th century date. The group includes part of what appears to be the bowl of a giant pipe with extremely unusual incised decoration (Fig. 4.8, B5.1).

Context 12 - Nearly half of the 68 pieces in this group are of mid-17th century date, including three of the bowls present; the rest seem to belong to the mid-to late 18th century. The bore date of 1692 reflects a mean between what might be termed a "derived" and a "depositional" group of pipes. Apart from layer 12 and possibly layer 11, which has only three fragments, the remaining contexts should date from the early 19th century, or later.

Site C

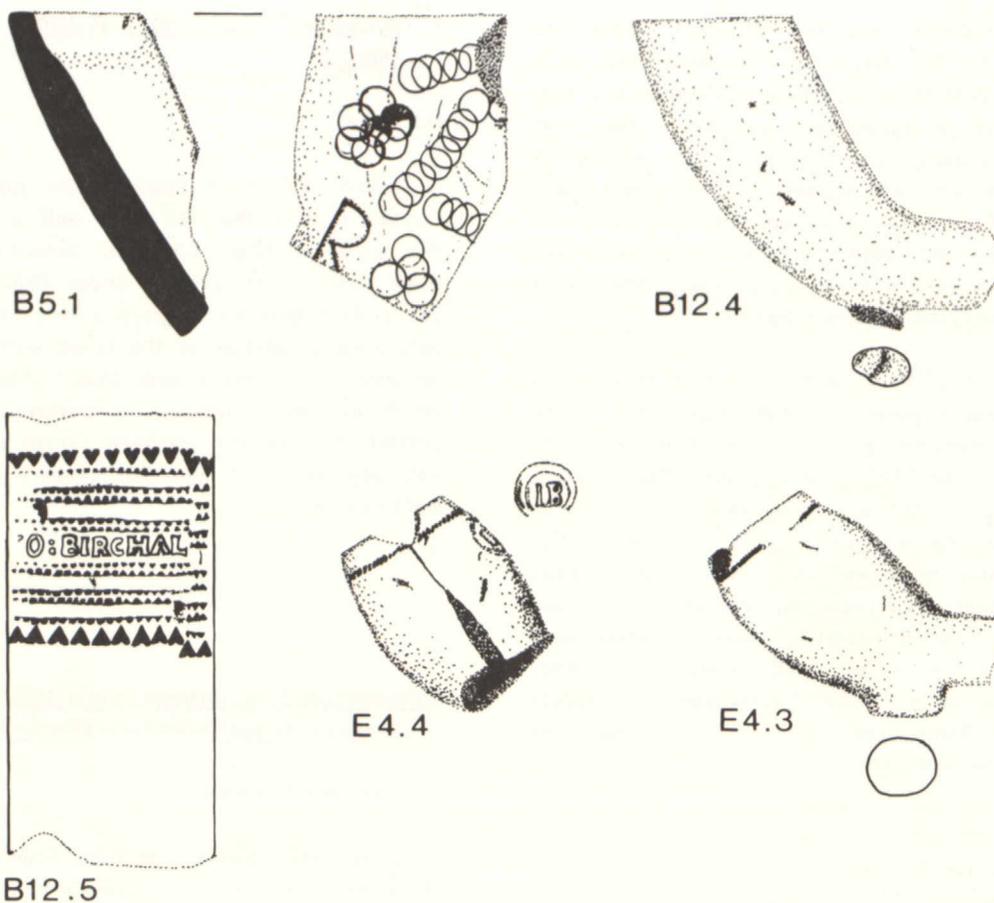
The single fragment from Layer 1 is of 19th century date, or later; layer 7 contains three fragments which are probably of 17th century date.

Site E

The four bowls from this site (E4) are all of mid-17th century type.

The following finds deserve individual mention:

- A16/1 Bowl fragment; milled and bottered; apparently unsmoked. cf. Davey 1978b, Fig. 3, J. 1660-1680. 7/64".
- B5/1 Large fragment of coarse clay pipe decorated with incised circles and the initial R. Apparently part of a giant pipe with a cut off rim, though just possibly the skirts of a pipe-clay religious figurine, such as were made in Utrecht during the medieval and post-medieval periods. cf. Baart *et al.* 1977, 472-275. Date uncertain. See Fig. 4.8.
- B5/2 Heel fragment of a smoked pipe in "local" clay. Relief stamp reads HB or HS (retrograde). For two similar stamps and heels cf. Davey 1978b, Fig. 2, 14 and 15. 1700-1730. 6/64".
- B12/1 Fragment of a 17th century bowl; milled and bottered. cf. Davey 1978b, Fig. 3, A. 1640-1660.
- B12/2 Bowl fragment as B12/1. cf. Davey 1978b, Fig. 3, 1. 1640-1660.
- B12/3 Very worn bowl as B12/2. cf. Davey 1978b, Fig. 3, 1. 1640-1660. 6/64".
- B12/4 Burnished bowl with cut off rim. A south Lancashire form, but not previously published. Probably 1730-1760. 5/64". See Fig. 4.8.
- B12/5 Roller stamped stem with ..O:BIRCHAL. Similar in type to others from Rainford. cf. Davey 1978b, Fig. 2, 22-25. Although fragments of this particular stamp have been found before in field walking, this is the most complete example so far recovered. Probably 1720-1760. 6/64". See Fig. 4.8.
- B12/6 Bowl fragment; "imported clay". 18th century.
- B12/7 Heel fragments with long spurs in "imported clay". Probably second half of the 18th century. 5/64".
- E4/1 South Lancashire type 17th century bowl with HL (ligatured) in relief on the heel. These pipes may have been made at Primrose Hill, Rainford by Humphrey Lyon. 1640-1660. 6/64".
- E4/2 South Lancashire type spurred bowl with IB stamp on the front facing the smoker. cf. Davey 1978b, Fig. 1, 3. 7/64".



4.8 Clay tobacco pipes from Prescott. Scale: x1/1

E4/3 Bowl with a flat heel; milled and bottered. Although an unusual form, probably made locally. 1630-1650. 6/64". See Fig. 4.8.

N.B. E4/1-3: Although all apparently smoked, these pipes are in a low-fired, off-white fabric which seems to have been fumed in the firing.

E4/4 Fragment of a highly burnished, good quality product; milled and bottered. IB stamp in circular frame on the bowl. cf. Davey 1978b, Fig. 1, 6. (See Fig. 4.8).

Summary

Apart from the giant pipe, all the pipes from the Prescott excavations are of South Lancashire types and two certainly from Rainford (B12/5 and E4/1). Two are new forms (B12/4 and E4/3). There is no evidence for production in the town itself. Much larger groups will be required to provide a clearer picture of pipe production, consumption and loss in Prescott.

Other Finds

The excavations also produced 33 fragments of glass, 24 metal objects, two pieces of brass foundry slag (from site B) and a small quantity of animal bone and marine molluscs. Detailed reports are in the archive.

Discussion

The excavations produced no evidence for settlement before the 13th century. The development of the town into its 1592 form probably did not begin much before the Monday market, replacing an earlier Sunday one, became established in 1333. Thus, until the early 14th century, it was probably a religious centre surrounded by farms and farmland with possibly a small settlement to the east at Churchley. As a town, Prescott really grew after the establishment of the market. Its advantageous situation on the edge of the South Lancashire coalfield subsequently enabled it to develop into an industrial centre. Apart from the processing of agricultural produce, the first major industry recorded is the manufacture of pottery.

The later medieval wasters and daub from the excavations at 7-9 Derby Street form the first evidence for pottery manufacture in Prescot and hint at the presence of a kiln near the site. The court rolls and 1592 survey refer to two potters working in Prescot in the late 16th century: Edward Glover and James Ditchfield. James Cropper of Eccleston and Lawrence Gorsuch, whose son owned property in the town, are referred to as potters, though they need not have necessarily been working in Prescot.

Glover lived at 27-31 High Street, while Ditchfield's "workhouse" was opposite, at 24-30 High Street. The 1592 survey mentions potter's ovens being sited to the north of Ditchfield's workhouse (Bailey 1937, 40), probably on Glover's plot, thus bordering the Town Moss on the north-east edge of the town. This location outside the town centre is similar to many known medieval town potteries, presumably to avoid fire risk and the dispersal of noxious fumes near domestic buildings (Platt 1976, 57-8). All other kilns referred to in the court rolls and 1592 survey are probably kilns used for malting or processing other agricultural commodities.

Conclusion

The excavations demonstrate that post-medieval cellar construction has destroyed most of Prescot's later medieval street frontages. However, the back of building plots, unless built upon or modified in some way since the 17th century, still retain later medieval garden layers and potentially features. Later medieval and post-medieval pottery was recovered, some of which comprised wasters from the town's potteries.

Acknowledgements

For permission to excavate on the sites, I would like to thank Mr. C.M. Krelle, Messrs. J. and R. Jefferies of Grant Investment Trust Ltd., Mr. G. Beasley (Chairman of the Constitution Club) and Mr. S. Afzal. David Freke gave much help throughout the preparation of this report and I am particularly indebted to him. I would also like to thank Peter Davey and David Freke for the specialist reports; Clem Fisher for the archive bone report; Peter Trewin from the Knowsley Borough Council; and all those who dug on the various sites - Jimmy Irvine, Carmel and Gerry Glynn, Andy Dutton, Judith Callister, Betty Bottomley, Bobby Entwistle, Philippa Tomlinson, Peter Leather, Julian Bowsher and Catherine Eastman.

5. Observations at 82, Eccleston Street, 1980 (Site 2).

D.J. Freke

In January 1980, Peter Trewin of the Knowsley Borough Council noticed that the front wall of the cellar of this property (Fig. 1.3) was stone-built, with the brick wall of the present house constructed on it. The cellars were being given a brick inner skin and only a small portion of the stone wall was available for study. The stones were 15cm x 25cm, of unknown depth, and well coursed and mortared. It was not possible to date the masonry, except that this stone wall pre-dates the mid-19th century brick building now on the site.

6. Observations during landscape work at High Street (Sites 3 and 4) and Church Street (Site 5), 1981.

D.J. Freke and R. Holgate

In January 1981, Knowsley Borough Council engaged an Manpower Services Commission scheme to landscape three sites in Prescot (Fig. 1.3).

The work on the High Street (Sites 3 and 4) consisted of laying kerbstones to define and protect approximately five metres by one metre areas where trees were planted. The maximum depth reached was half a metre. Only 20th century building demolition layers were encountered.

At 12, Church Street (Site 5), the area was lowered by approximately half a metre, footings for flower beds were constructed and trees planted. The front portion of the site comprised infilled cellars from the 18th century building formerly standing on the site. No medieval deposits or any significant post-medieval deposits survived on the site.