Archaeological Excavation at Mary St., Limerick

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The excavation of this site in the oldest area of the city showed evidence of occupation from the Middle Ages onwards, though much of the medieval material had been disturbed by subsequent activity. However, some medieval layers and artefacts did remain, albeit in a disturbed state. The usual range of urban artefacts was recovered, medieval pottery, with both imported and local wares being represented, as well as leather, glass and bone.

Introduction

The site is located at 48-50 Mary Street, on King’s Island. Mary Street was the original medieval High Street of Limerick’s English town, which ran in a north-south direction from King John’s Castle and Thomond Bridge to Baals Bridge, which linked the English town with the Irish town situated on the left bank of the River Shannon (Fig. 1). The site is bounded to the west by Mary Street, to the east by the northern relief road, to the north by a vacant narrow plot, now used as a lane and to the south by Fish Lane, so called as it led to the medieval Fish Gate near where a fish house was located (Joyce 1995, 29). The Civil Survey documents buildings on the site in the seventeenth century (Simington, 1938) and it had been occupied within living memory though was vacant prior to the excavation. The excavation was undertaken on behalf of Limerick City Council, in advance of development.

The Excavation

The writer carried out the excavation [under archaeological licence 00E0635] over ten weeks from October to December 2000. The City Archaeologist, who also monitored a series of bore-holes in advance of the excavation, carried out the initial stripping of the overburden. Two trenches [A and B] were excavated by hand. Trench A was fifteen metres long and orientated east-west. Trench B was thirty metres in length and ran in a north-south direction. Due to the restricted nature of the trenches, each being only 4 metres wide at top and tapering to 2 metres at base, overall interpretation was sometimes difficult. Both trenches were dug to a depth of almost three and four metres respectively. During these excavations a portion of a substantial undercroft or stone cellar feature was also discovered. Further works in 2002 revealed the presence of several more cellar features in the western portion of the site. These will be subject to discussion elsewhere (Collins forthcoming).

Much of the excavated material was modern, early modern or post-medieval. However, some medieval deposits were recovered. These deposits appeared to be medieval dumps for the most part, containing medieval pottery sherds, with all the major assemblages represented (analysis below).

In trench A, at its west end, the lower courses of three conjoined limestone walls [c3, c4, c5] were exposed beneath the overburden [c1]. Wall [c3] was a north-south wall and had a dry stone facing of
roughly coursed limestone blocks with a rubble core. It survived to a height of about 1.10m high and 0.85m in width. Wall [c4] was an east-west wall, 2.10m in length, 0.85m in width and about 1.40m in height. Wall [c4] was keyed into [c3] at the west and [c5] to the east. Therefore it is likely that all three walls once formed part of the same structure, although the function of that structure is unknown. Wall [c5] was 1.2m long north-south, 0.95m wide and survived to a height of 1m. From the excavation the three walls appeared to be contemporary, however no definite dating material was associated with them. Wall [c5] was cut by the construction of the undercroft wall [c2], which implies that [c5] was earlier than [c2]. It was also demonstrated that wall [c3] was earlier than [c2]. Therefore walls [c3, c4 and c5] probably pre-date or are at least contemporary with the 16th–17th century undercroft feature c2 (plate 1).
The only feature of note in the east end of trench A was a stone-lined drain [c28], covered with stone lintels, which was covered by several thick layers of mixed dumped material. This drain traversed into trench B also, [c74] (plate 2). This drain in trench A measured 2m in length and 0.70m in width. It reached a maximum depth of 0.55m. It ran in a northwest to southeast direction. There was no dating evidence associated with this feature in either trench, but due to its depth and relationship with other deposits, would appear to be medieval in date. Similar drains have been found on other archaeological sites in Limerick, which have been allocated medieval dates (C.O’Rahilly, pers comm.). Several dump deposits containing medieval pottery overlaid this drain feature although these were by no means in situ remains themselves. The remainder of trench A was filled with a series of very disturbed deposits and modern features. While some of the deposits excavated at the basal levels of trench A appeared to be medieval in composition, that is, they were formed of dark organic humic material, due to the restricted nature of the trench and the lack of diagnostic finds, positive identification could not be made.
Plate 2: Drain [c 28] at east end of trench A, taken from north

Trench B had quite a depth of overburden, which was removed partially by machine and then by hand. Several layers of rough stone paving were discovered in the upper layers of trench B, but due to disturbance it was impossible gauge their date accurately. The southern end of this trench, for an area of about thirty-two square metres, was disturbed by later modern activity and was found for the most part to be overburden [c36] resting on the natural clays [c16] (the subsoil). When the sections of this part of the trench were cleaned a footing of an east-west stone wall was revealed [c100], which was 1.20m in width and was on average 0.40m in depth. This was associated with some stone collapse [c57] and a narrower wall [c81] which protruded the surface of the trench. It was composed primarily of red brick. This was built on an earlier wall, or a more substantial foundation, consisting of mortared limestone rubble. No date could be assigned to this wall but it seemed from its foundation cut that it was modern rather than medieval. To the north of this wall feature, a thick layer of material [c36] filled the trench. This layer was composed primarily of sandy rubble material with inclusions of red brick, stone and animal bone. It was on average 2.5m in thickness.

Several features were of interest in the trench although none could be fully exposed and excavated due to the narrowness of the trench. The first was an elaborate drain feature [c70]. The cut of the drain was u-shaped in profile and was lined with a setting of flat limestones. These stones were held in place against the inside of the drain cut by two parallel rows of wooden stakes, some up to 0.60m in length (identified as Ash; O’Carroll, 2002). The drain was filled with a grey silty material. It appeared as though this fill had been lain down by water due to its very silty nature. At the base of the fill was a deposit of twiggy material. When the sides of the drain were cleaned a lens of wattle was noted near the top of the drain. This suggested that the drain had been covered by a mat of wattle, which had both decayed and fallen into the base of the drain. It was also pressed into the edge of the
drain top, due to use. It is also possible that the wooden stakes, while holding the stone sides of the drain also supported the wattle-mat covering for the drain. An excellent parallel for this drain feature was found during excavations at Waterford (Scully and McCutcheon 1997, 53-136). The Waterford drain was found inside a house during the Peter Street excavations, (plot 2, level II). It was a sill beam house, which had an interior linear drain covered with a wattle mat and lined with wooden planks. The excavators dated this house and the feature to the late 12th to early 13th century. The wattle was interpreted as ‘... filtering any excess moisture into the subterranean conduit’ (ibid. 119).

The drain feature [C70] found at Mary Street is very similar in nature to that found at Waterford (Fig. 2, Plate 3). It was impossible to establish however if the drain in Limerick was inside a structure. It does seem likely that it was an interior feature, as wattle matting outside would not seem to be durable enough for the elements. A leather sole was found beside the drain on its northern side (00E0635:71:6, see below). If this feature was medieval in date and an internal drain for a house of some type, then this suggests that structures in medieval Limerick were built away from the street frontage, and put up in the middle of burgage (property) plots. This would indicate that space was at a premium in the medieval town, with the original long narrow plots being subdivided at some stage in the medieval period. It is also possible that it shows the prosperity of the town, with each plot perhaps having several structures, which fulfilled different purposes, as has been proven in some English medieval towns (Patin 1962-3, 202-39).

Fig.2: Plan of drain [C70]
Plate 3: Drain [c70] with stone and stake lining, taken from west

Fig 3: Plan of [c64] vertical stakes
Tentative evidence for plot boundaries was also found in the form of an area of timber stakes and pegs [c64] (Fig. 3). This was a collection of sixteen stakes in no discernible pattern or sequence. It appeared from the excavation that there was at least two phases of stakes, indicating that the features were sustained and replaced over a period of time. Due to the fairly linear nature of the feature it has been tentatively interpreted as a burgage plot boundary or perhaps an internal boundary for an animal pen or such like. The stakes were found to be Ash (O’Carroll, 2002).

A stone setting [c78] was recorded in the lower levels of Trench B. It measured 2.20m north-south by 2m and was only about 0.20m in depth due to disturbance (Fig. 4). Several flattish limestones were set in circular fashion around a sub-circular stone-free depression. It is possible that this feature was the remains of a kiln of some type (there was no debris to indicate its precise function). Kilns are fairly common features in medieval towns and some particularly good examples were excavated at the North Gate in Cork City (Hurley, 1997a, 23-4). The kilns found there were dated to the late thirteenth to early fourteenth century.

Fig. 4: Plan of stone setting [c78]

In trench B there were several deposits of timber and wood chippings, which appeared to have been dumped, perhaps in the medieval period due to their depth. Some of the smaller pieces had bark remaining and were Birch and Ash. The largest timber recovered was from context [c87]. It was over 2m in length and was rounded at one terminal, which also had a small circular perforation.
This timber was associated with another smaller one, [c88]. Both were in very poor condition and disintegrated upon removal. Several wooden pegs were found strewn between the timbers along with some leather fragments. These timbers, especially, [c87], appear to be structural due to their size but their function could not be established, as they were not found in situ. The natural parent material (estuarine clays) on the site was encountered at approximately three metres above sea level.

The Finds
Finds are numbered according to guidelines, as set out by the National Museum of Ireland. The excavation licence number precedes the context number from which the find was retrieved and the last number is the number of the find from that context.

Animal Bone
Animal bone was represented in twenty-seven of the contexts excavated. Some showed evidence of butchering in the form of cut marks or splitting. All the usual domesticates were represented, cattle, pig and sheep with some horse. In all, almost fifteen kilograms of animal bone was retrieved, none from a secure context.

One bone artefact was recovered. This is a possible tuning peg from a musical instrument (Fig.5). It does, however, have unusual perforations. It is not square in section and not shouldered, as is usual for tuning pegs. Normally pegs of this type have one perforation at one terminal through which the string of the instrument (which might be of metal, animal sinew or hide) could be pulled and tightened, much as the strings on a modern guitar or harp. This example, however, has a partial perforation to the centre of the peg, which connects to a second perforation, bore through the top of the peg. This hole is partially plugged by an additional piece of bone, cut especially for this purpose. The entire shaft of the peg is incised with linear grooves, which are fairly uniform. The other terminal of the peg is cut to a narrow plate, with notches cut at either edge, as if it were decorated. Tuning pegs are not unusual from medieval urban contexts. Unfortunately this example was found in the disturbed overburden. Five such pegs were located in Waterford (Hurley 1997b, 665-66). Based on size it is likely that this peg came from a small stringed instrument rather than from an instrument such as a harp.

00E0635: 1: 165 Tuning Peg (possible) 60mm long, 10mm maximum thickness, perforation at one end, partially plugged, connecting with another perforation in shaft, several linear grooved lines around shaft, other terminal a thin plate with notching, perhaps decoration, from overburden.

Fig.5: 00E0635: 1:165, possible tuning peg
Stone
Only three artefacts of stone were recovered from the excavation. The rotary quernstone was found in the overburden on the site, so may have come from elsewhere. The flint nodule may be identified as a waste product, rather than an artefact in its own right. The circular disc, while found in medieval contexts of other excavations may have had a variety of purposes, including that of personal ornament.

00E0635: 1:2  Half a rotary quernstone, sandstone, diameter 300mm, overburden
00E0635: 40:2  1 flint nodule, possibly struck, rubble dumped material
00E0635: 89:3  Circular disc with central perforation, diameter 15mm, humic dumped material

Metal
00E0635: 1:3  Iron nails 40mm long, overburden
00E0635: 9:2  Lead fragment, rectangular, perforated at one corner, 60x40mm, black silty deposit
00E0635: 40:3  Fragment of 17th century mortar bomb, rubble dumped material
00E0635: 40:4  Fragment of 17th century mortar bomb, rubble dumped material
00E0635: 40:5  Fragment of Iron Slag, rubble dumped material
00E0635: 44:1  Iron Slag Fragment, wall foundation
00E0635: 48:1  Iron Slag Fragment, clay filled layer
00E0635: 55:4  Iron Slag Fragment, black humic layer
00E0635: 62:2  Iron Slag Fragment, area of paving
00E0635: 69:1  Iron Spike. Circular in section. Tapered at one end with the other pointed solid. 180mm long, fill of drain [c70]
00E0635: 71:8  Lead, curved strip, possible glass came or mount, 30mm long, reddish brown humic layer
00E0635: 71:9  Lead, flat fragment. Unidentified use. reddish brown humic layer
00E0635: 71:10  Iron nail tapering to point, round head, very corroded, 6cm long. reddish brown humic layer
00E0635: 71:11  Fragment of vitreous slag reddish brown humic layer
00E0635: 79:2  Iron nail, flat head tapering to point, fill of possible large cut feature
00E0635: 92:3  Fragment of slag, grey and brown clay layer
Later Medieval and Post-Medieval Pottery

Twenty-three contexts excavated yielded 374 sherds of later, post-medieval and early modern (post-1700) pottery. The majority of these fragments (137 sherds) came from the overburden [c1] of the site. Due to the disturbance on the site, this pottery could not be used as a reliable dating method and many of the contexts, which contained the later pottery also had sherds of medieval pottery (see above). Predominantly, the post-medieval pottery was represented by two types: North Devon wares (both gravel-tempered and gravel free were recovered) and German stoneware in the form of Bartmann vessels. The assemblage is typical of an urban site. Similar collections have been found at the excavations in Skiddy’s Castle and Christ Church, Cork City (Gahan and Twogig 1997) and those also at North Gate, Cork City (McCutcheon 1997) as well as elsewhere in Limerick city (Lynch 1984). The type and date range of the post medieval pottery recovered from the site is detailed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>DATE RANGE</th>
<th>SHERD COUNT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>German Stone ware, Frechen (Bartmanns)</td>
<td>16th-17th century</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German Stone ware, Westerwald</td>
<td>17th-18th century</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creamwares</td>
<td>18th century</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Glazed Ware</td>
<td>18th century</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tin-glazed earthenware</td>
<td>17th-18th century</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Earthenware (glazed and unglazed)</td>
<td>18th-19th century</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Devon gravel tempered wares, gravel free and Sgraffito wares</td>
<td>17th century</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer print wares</td>
<td>Late 18th-19th century</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bristol/Staffordshire Slipware</td>
<td>18th century</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl wares</td>
<td>Late 18th-19th century</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Summary of Later Medieval / Post-Medieval Pottery 48-50 Mary Street

Clay Pipes
Five contexts excavated contained clay pipe fragments. Twenty-four stems were recovered and five bowls. None was intact nor did they have any maker’s or other such marks visible. All were manufactured from white clay.

Glass
Three contexts contained glass fragments: three sherds of brown glass, 2 clear sherds and 1 green bottle base were recovered. All were post-medieval/modern in date.

Leather
Leather is a common find in medieval urban excavations, with shoes, clothing, bags, belts, scabbards, knife sheaths and other everyday items being manufactured from it (Hurley 1997a, 149-153). Shoes
are by far the most common leather item found during urban excavations, with those at Waterford yielding over 700 footwear fragments, with 9 classes of footwear being represented there (O’Rourke 1997, 703-42). Here, 9 fragments of leather were recovered from 4 contexts, all in trench B.

00E0635: 55:2  Square fragment (100mm by 100mm) folded double, function unknown
00E0635: 55:3  Fragment of possible strap (110mm long, 35mm wide)
00E0635: 71:3  2 fragments of shoe sole, toe and heel (70mm by 50mm long)
00E0635: 71:4  Several fragments, unidentifiable
00E0635: 71:5  Fragment of L strap 92mm long, 25mm wide)
00E0635: 71:6  Shoe Sole (230mm long, 70mm wide)
00E0635: 71:7  Shoe Sole and upper, laces attaches, very poor condition
00E0635: 89:2  2 fragments, unidentifiable
00E0635: 92:2  Shoe sole and upper, laces attached, poor condition

**Human Bone (Identification by Ms Linda Lynch)**

One fragment of human bone was recovered. This is not surprising as the site is very close to the religious houses of the Franciscan Abbey, which lies to the east (Hurley 1997, 69-70) and the Fratres Cruciferi, (Hanley 1998, 118-20) which lies a short distance to the southwest. As such it is likely (as indeed with the medieval floor tiles above) that this fragment originated from one of those sites (Gwynn and Hadcock 1988).

00E0635: 96:1  Human skull fragment

**Summation**

Archaeological stratigraphy was found in both of the trenches excavated. From the excavation it appeared that the site’s archaeology had been quite disturbed by later activity. The excavation provides some evidence of what medieval Limerick may have looked like in the period between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. The long narrow burgage plots of the city can be identified, with buildings along the street frontage (possibly with undercrofts) and gardens to the rear. Lanes would have provided access from the main street (Mary Street) to the rear of the plots where there was probably an area of commonage between the plots and the town wall.

The excavated remains show that this site was used extensively from the medieval period through to modern times. They indicate that it was predominantly a dumping area for refuse, though the stone lined drain [c70] may tentatively suggest, from comparative evidence from Waterford, that a structure may have once stood at that location. If this was the case it would show that medieval Limerick was a thriving place, with space at a premium, as this structure would not have fronted onto the main street but would have been some distance from it. The floor tiles shed light on the religious houses that were situated adjacent to the excavated area, the Franciscan friary and the house of the Fratres Cruciferi or Crutched Friars. The relative rarity of such elaborate tiles in the Irish archaeological record shows the wealth and splendour that these foundations must have achieved when at the height of their power and influence. The pottery evidence proves that Limerick was trading with several countries, mainly England and France in the medieval period, with Germany being added in the later and post medieval period.

In conclusion, though this excavation was limited in extent, it has yielded a similar artefact range

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to other Irish medieval towns. Limerick City, while it has not yet the published excavation material of Cork or Waterford certainly has the potential to reveal as much important archaeology as those other Munster cities.

Appendix 1

Medieval Pottery and Tiles

Clare McCutcheon

A total of 316 sherds of medieval pottery were recovered on the site. Following some reassembly within and between contexts, this was reduced to 289 sherds. The fabric types have been identified visually and the information is presented in Table 1. The number of sherds in each fabric type is listed with the minimum number of vessels (MNV) represented by these sherds. This minimum number is based on the presence of rim/handle junctions, as this is the most accurate method of determining the presence of a jug. As jugs represent the majority of the forms produced, this method of quantification ensures at least the majority of fabric types can be relatively accurately quantified. It is more useful for indicating overall use of pottery at any particular time if conservative and consistent numbers can be produced on a site-by-site basis, leading to greater use for researchers in the future. The probable form and the date range of the fabric types are also listed in the table. The identification of each sherd by feature and finds number is contained on the archive database.

Sherd links were noted between contexts Trench A:[c9] (a black silty deposit) and Trench B:[c55] (also a black silty deposit) and between Trench A:[c15] (deposit of rubble collapse) and Trench B:[c40] (rubble dump deposit). In addition, in Trench B, there was a sherd link between [c89] (stony blackish brown material) and [c96] (another stony deposit).

Comparable medieval assemblages already published from King John’s Castle (Sweetman 1980a); Charlotte’s Quay (Lynch 1984); St Saviour’s Priory (McCutcheon 1996) as well as excavations at adjoining or nearby sites at Fish Lane / Sir Harry’s Mall and St Francis Abbey (McCutcheon forthcoming (a & b)) provide accessible comparisons. In addition, excavations in Co. Limerick at Adare Castle (Sweetman 1980b), Tankardstown and Main Street, Adare (McCutcheon forthcoming (c & d)) and at Attynfin (Sandes forthcoming) assist in the development of the clear recognition of a distinct pottery type from Adare Castle and its distribution. Detailed study and publication of the many excavations in Limerick city carried out in the later 1980s and 1990s should enable a clearer picture of the medieval pottery of Limerick city and county and the relative percentages of English, continental and locally-made wares to emerge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fabric type</th>
<th>Sherds</th>
<th>MNV</th>
<th>MVR</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ham Green B</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jug</td>
<td>L12th-M13th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redcliffe</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jugs</td>
<td>M13th-14th</td>
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<td>Miscellaneous French</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>Jug, chafing dish?</td>
<td>L12th-M13th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saintonge green glazed</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>&gt;3 juges, pewau</td>
<td>13th-14th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saintonge unglazed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>Jug</td>
<td>13th-14th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saintonge polychrome</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jug</td>
<td>L13th-E14th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saintonge green painted</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jug</td>
<td>L13th-E14th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saintonge sgraftto</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jug</td>
<td>L13th-E14th</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adare-type</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>&gt;2</td>
<td>Jug</td>
<td>M13th-14th?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Limerick-type</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>&gt;2</td>
<td>Jug</td>
<td>M13th-14th?</td>
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<td>Total medieval</td>
<td>289</td>
<td></td>
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Table 1: Medieval pottery 48-50 Mary Street (00E635)
Ham Green ware:
The ware from the Ham Green kiln has been extensively described (Barton 1963; Ponsford 1991) and Ham Green B ware dates from the late twelfth to the mid-thirteenth century. There are characteristic differences in style between the ‘A’ and ‘B’ ware as a common design in the ‘B’ ware was a stabbed and slashed motif down the handle, a distinctive ridge below the rim and thumbed bases. Many of the ‘B’ wares were decorated with applied plastic decoration.

Redcliffe:
This wheel-thrown ware, also from Bristol, replaced the earlier hand-built Ham Green ware by the mid-thirteenth century (ibid. 95). The sandy fabric generally fired to a dark beige/cream sandwich with a grey core. Several of the sherds were decorated with applied scales and lines in a contrasting brown firing clay and such decorations were common on Redcliffe jugs.

Miscellaneous French:
Four sherds of undiagnostic French ware were also recovered. The white ware fabric and bright green glaze is a general indication of French wares as found in Ireland although the actual source of such pieces has not yet been located.

Saintonge wares:
The ware from the Saintonge region of south-west France was imported into Ireland and Britain as a consequence of the extensive wine trade with Bordeaux (Chapelot 1983; Deroeux & Dufournier 1991). The fabric is fine, creamy-white and micaceous and the vessels were generally lead glazed, although some were unglazed. The forms of the jugs are both distinctive and repetitive and variety was achieved with the use variations in the glaze.

Saintonge mottled green glazed: Copper filings were added to the lead glaze to give a mottled effect to these jugs. These jugs are generally tall, with flat, splayed bases, applied bridge spouts and strap handles. Decoration, when present, consists of simple, vertically applied, thumbed strips.

Saintonge Late thirteenth–early fourteenth century: The Saintonge polychrome wares have been closely dated to the late thirteenth to early fourteenth centuries (Dunning 1968, 45; Allan 1983, 200–1). As both the sgraffito and the all-over green forms are found in association with the polychrome, they are treated together. The forms of all three varieties present are small jugs. While the fabric is that of the Saintonge mottled green glaze above, the decoration and glazing create quite a different appearance.

Polychrome: The copper is ground to a powder and painted onto the vessel, the clear lead glaze giving a creamy overall colour to the unpainted parts of the vessel. The vessels were decorated with trefoils, shields or birds and often with faces applied on either side of the rim. Occasionally some vessels were also glazed on the interior.

Green painted: A single rim/handle, with the copper reduced to filings and painted onto the leather-hard vessel was recovered in a rubble layer in Trench A (F9).

Sgraffito. Decoration is produced by means of incised lines on areas of slip which appear brown/red when copper free glaze is applied, while the unslipped area appears pale yellow. The sherds present are too fragmentary to hazard a guess as to decoration but a possible form is the “Fox and Cockerel”, examples of which have been found at Southampton (Platt & Coleman-Smith 1975, no.1020) and Waterford (Gahan & McCutcheon 1997) as well as in Cork (McCutcheon 1996; forthcoming (e)). Eight sherds of sgraffito-decorated ware were found in the excavations at Fish Lane/Sir Harry’s Mall (McCutcheon forthcoming (a)).
Adare-type/Limerick-type wares:

The designation of a ware as a type is recommended practice in pottery studies and indicates that a ware has been consistently found in a particular area while evidence for a production centre or kiln has not yet been uncovered (Blake & Davey 1983). In the case of Limerick, this situation is somewhat anomalous and the term Limerick-type can be used to describe the county rather than simply the city. As the general term London-type (Pearce et al. 1985) and Dublin-type ware (McCutcheon in prep) has been adopted to describe wares that share general traditions and clay sources from assemblages far greater than what has been published from Limerick to date, the term Limerick-type ware may be used in the broadest sense here. Only two medieval pottery kilns have been found and excavated in Ireland, at Carrickfergus (Simpson et al. 1979) and Downpatrick (Pollock & Waterman 1963) and fragmentary remains of a third at Dundalk were recorded in 1997 (Campbell, 1998). There is considerable evidence, however, that there may have been a medieval pottery kiln at Adare Castle (Sweetman 1980b), including surface wasters recovered during field walking (A. MacDonald pers. comm.).

Adare-type:

The clay used in this pottery is an iron-rich silty clay with 25% quartzite (Cleary 1995, table 22). In this, the clay is very similar to that found in a wide area of Limerick and Cork (ibid. 74) but the distinctive different in the Adare-type ware is the firing technique which results in a dark grey core or sandwich effect in section. ‘Sherds which have grey cores are the result of rapid firing where the atmosphere in the centre of the vessel wall lacks the necessary oxygen to fully convert the iron compounds to oxides ... This results in grey cores which are the product of a semi-reducing atmosphere’ (ibid.). Many of the wasters recovered during fieldwalking also show evidence of poorly mixed clay with air pockets that blew out in the kiln, shattering the pot. Small bulges or air pockets have been noted occasionally on Adare-type pottery recovered in other excavations already cited. While the rapid firing technique and the air pockets may suggest a potter in a hurry, the jugs are well-made and finished off with confident decorative motifs and firmly attached handles. A broad date range of late 13th to 14th century has been suggested for this ware (Table 1), but it may be that this ware is the product of a single potter over a short period of time.

The majority of the vessels represented in this assemblage are jugs with strap handles, although a narrow undecorated strap handle may represent a small narrow necked drinking jug and a number of this latter type have been found in Dublin (McCutcheon 1995). A typical jug in this ware would have a pulled spout, decorated strap handle and thumbed or splayed base.

The decorative patterns on six strap handle fragments could be noted with certainty although three of these may well be from the same handle. The codes for the decorative motifs are based on the extensive assemblages at Wood Quay, Dublin, and the seventeen standard decorative motifs have been replicated in all locally-made assemblages in Ireland (McCutcheon in prep). The handle sherds were decorated with diagonal slashing between two parallel lines (E1). This is the most typical pattern found on later 13th century locally-made pottery in Ireland. There was some variety in the types of bases present with both thumbed and plain base sherds were present.

Decoration on the body of the jugs consisted of vertically applied strips and pads in a contrasting colour and was present on four of the sherds. Two sherds were decorated with four-pronged wavy comb design.

Limerick-type:

The sherds that fall into this group are much less clear-cut than the Adare-type pottery and loosely
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