Breamore Priory Small Finds. By Tony Light

1898 Excavation

Sixty fragments of encaustic tiles are held by Salisbury Museum and have been catalogued by Elizabeth Eames and published within the Salisbury Museum Medieval Catalogue, Part 1, pages 93-139. At least 27 distinct designs are known from Breamore, and as all but three are at present unknown from other sites, the Priory may have had its own tile kiln. Most would appear to be products of the Wessex School of manufacture and date to the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries. Five fragments of one design unique to Breamore depict four fish inlaid alternately, from left to right, across the tiles.

Ten fragments are also on display in Breamore House, and at least two of these may be further distinct designs.

Only two other items are known to survive from this excavation; 1) a shallow stone mortar, c.250mm in diameter, with four lugs, the two larger of which are triangular, narrowing downwards to form ribs and a slightly raised diamond shaped base. The two smaller lugs also connect to the raised base. A fourteenth-century date is likely. 2) a single piece of chalk-based wall-plaster with wattle impressions at the back has its surface painted purple but appears to be 'marbled' with yellow and grey.

No metal finds are known.

1975 Excavation by Selwyn Ingrams

Most finds came from a single trench located on the northern edge of what was expected to be the church nave, although no surviving remains of the building were located within the area investigated. Most of the items recovered came from the upper rubble levels of the destruction phase of the ecclesiastical buildings after 1536. Ephemeral buildings of the post-dissolution phase were located here and some of the pottery belonged to this period. The site was no longer occupied after 1593. All of the finds from this excavation are held at Breamore House.

In all, more than 130 sherds of pottery were recovered, ranging from thirteenth-/fourteenth-century coarse wares and jugs through to a number of probably imported fine wares, small 'Tudor Green' vessels and local earthenwares of 'Verwood' type.

A further 80 fragments of encaustic tile were retained, many of them paralleling types from the earlier excavation. There are, however, a number which do not appear to have been recorded elsewhere.

Ceramic and slate roof-tiles were mostly discarded, but examples of ridge tiles glazed green and orange were recovered, all probably being of fourteenth-/fifteenth-century date.

Animal bones, (mostly sheep), occurred in small numbers and bone objects included a knife or tool handle and an elaborately carved head of a ‘pin’ which may perhaps have been a parchment-pricker.

Metalwork was well preserved and, as might be expected, included considerable quantities of iron nails and other fitments from the buildings. Tools included chisels, an awl, an ‘ox-goad’, a small pair of shears and a possible palette knife. A buckle, a door latch, two ‘dove type’ horseshoes of the thirteenth/fourteenth centuries, a key and, more unusually, two iron rowel-spurs probably of fifteenth-century date, were also found. Several more finely produced items may have been clock components, but this would need to be verified.

Copper-alloy items included box and furniture decorations and bindings, tacks, strap-ends, a scabbard chape and knife handle fitments. A stud, 32mm in diameter, with a stamped ‘floral’ decoration was gold-plated and was presumably a furniture decoration. A 4-lobed, hinged, harness pendant had a naïve representation of an archer shooting a stag from behind a tree, inlaid in blue enamel.

A large lead ampulla, 95mm high and 63mm across, was decorated overall at the front with small adjacent hexagonal ‘scales’. The flattened reverse had an elaborately incised hatched star pattern in

a roundel, with two crosses in the centre of another circle. A band of chevrons linked the two handles.