

THE SHIRE HALL  
AGINCOURT SQUARE  
MONMOUTH

*A Programme of Archaeological Work  
for  
Monmouthshire County Council*

Carried out by

MONMOUTH ARCHAEOLOGY

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## *Summary*

Monmouth Archaeology carried out a Programme of Archaeological Work for Monmouthshire County Council during the refurbishment of The Shire Hall, Agincourt Square, Monmouth (NGR SO 50765 12827).

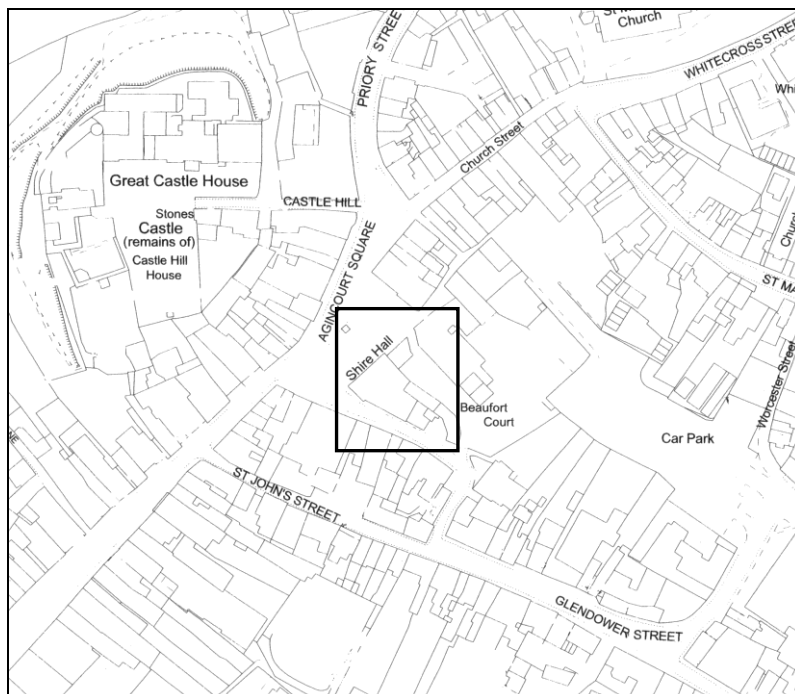
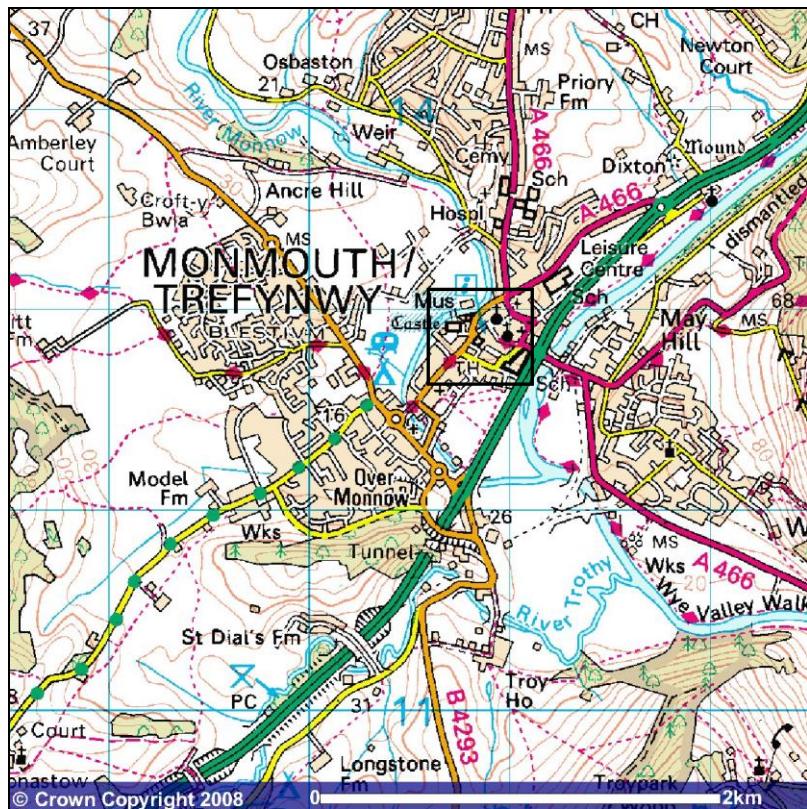
The archaeological element of the watching brief concerned the excavation of the lift shaft and associated works. There was some trial work in other areas and the service excavations outside the building. The archaeological contractors also made a photographic record of the upstanding features which were revealed by the refurbishment work.

Monmouth Archaeological Society (as distinct from Monmouth Archaeology) carried out a watching brief and mitigation excavation during groundworks in Agincourt Square and Agincourt Street for the Shire Hall services. The results of this work are included in this report although it was carried out voluntarily (with the kind cooperation of the Council and the electrical groundworks contractors) as the trenches were outside the enclosed area of the project.

The results of the Society's work are important as they provide proof that Agincourt Square was inside the Pre-Flavian (1<sup>st</sup> Century) Roman Fort. Later Roman remains superseded this context and post-Roman (Dark Age) levels, under an early Norman layer (late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries). All of these deposits were sealed by a medieval road surface, composed of iron slag, with traces of cobbles (of the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> centuries); these pre-dated later road surfaces and deposits up to modern times.

As the service trenches were sloping upwards, the early medieval and Roman levels were not entered inside the area enclosed by the site hoardings. The services entered the site just on the south side of the Charles Rolls statue.

It seems likely that some of the Roman levels remain intact in Room G12 where they may have been protected by the various redeposited contexts. In most other areas of the site, the construction groundworks for the Shire Hall have probably removed any pre-18<sup>th</sup> century archaeological resource.



**The Shire Hall, Agincourt Square, Monmouth : Site Location**

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## ***Introduction***

Monmouth Archaeology carried out a Programme of Archaeological Work for Monmouthshire County Council during the refurbishment of The Shire Hall, Agincourt Square, Monmouth (NGR SO 50765 12827).

The Programme of Archaeological Work was recommended by Monmouthshire County Council's archaeological advisors, Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust which considered that a significant archaeological resource may have survived on the site.

Monmouth Archaeology wishes to acknowledge the help given by the contractors on the site, Linford-Bridgeman, and the project manager John Hamner. The unit is also grateful for the help received from Mr. Neil Maylan and the staff of Monmouthshire County Council's archaeological advisors, the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust.

Members of the Monmouth Archaeological Society and Monmouth Archaeology covered excavations outside the hoardings which enclosed the refurbishment area voluntarily.

The Programme of Archaeological Work took place from December 2008 to September 2009.

## ***Objectives***

The objectives of the Programme of Archaeological Work were to safeguard any archaeological remains and to understand the nature, date and extent of any archaeological features and deposits which existed on the proposed development site. All remains of potential interest were recorded and finds retained.

## ***Methodology***

Stephen Clarke and Jane Bray of Monmouth Archaeology were present on the site during the excavation work and the watching brief and mitigation excavations were carried out to the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *'Standards for Archaeological Watching Briefs'*. The archaeological contractors also viewed and recorded any interesting structural remains revealed during refurbishment.

The continuation of the electricity trenches from The Shire Hall into Agincourt Street and Agincourt Square were not subject to the programme of archaeological work and so were monitored voluntarily by Monmouth Archaeological Society in conjunction with Monmouth Archaeology.

A photographic record was maintained during the excavations, while plans and sections were drawn and context records were kept in accordance with normal archaeological practice.

The finds were related to the contexts in which they originated and were examined by recognised specialists.

## *The Archaeology*

It seems likely that some of the Roman and later levels remain intact in Room G12 where they may have been protected by the various redeposited contexts. However, in most other areas of the site the construction groundworks for the Shire Hall itself have probably removed any pre-18<sup>th</sup> century archaeological resource.

The earliest finds were those made during the Monmouth Archaeological Society's watching brief on the electricity service trench outside the hoardings in Agincourt Street and Agincourt Square. The earliest finds from inside the development site were sherds of Roman Severn Valley ware recovered during the trial excavation in Community Room G12.

### **Earlier Doorway (See Site Plan/Section C-D/Photographs)**

An earlier doorway, which had been filled in, was discovered between rooms G01 and G22. The sandstone wall (021), on the west, had some old plaster facing surviving on its upper part, with decaying timbers (022) above.

Two courses of the original eastern wall (024) were observed below the present floor level and were associated with pieces of rotten timber, bone fragments and a carved stone. Rough stonework (025) lay at the base of the doorway.

### **Community Room G12 (See Site Plan)**

#### **Trial excavations in the western section of room G12.**

Old humus (004) was reached at 1.00m and continued to the base of the trial excavations at 1.40m. Above Context 004 was a redeposited natural clay (003) over which lay a compacted surface of pebbles and slag (002) at 0.80m, this was topped by compacted soil, clay with lime (001).

Three sherds of Roman Severn Valley ware were recovered from Context 004.

It seems likely that the Roman levels remain intact in Room G12 where they may have been protected by the various redeposited contexts.

#### **Trial excavation in south-east corner of room G12.**

This excavation re-opened and extended an earlier (engineer's?) trial hole. Sandy, light brown soil (009) was reached at 1.25m and extended to the base of the trial excavation at 1.35m. Brown humus (008) lay at 0.80m below the pavement level just outside, with redeposited natural clay (007) over. Rubble,

soil, stone and brick fragments (006) extended to a depth of 0.50m over which lay compacted soil, clay and lime (005).

### **Room G23 (see site plan)**

During the refurbishment in room G23 an old doorway was revealed high up in the corner of the south-east wall of the room. This is thought to have been the entrance/exit to the court room to the east. Evidence of a stairway is suggested by some scarring on the wall below the doorway.

### **Room G24 (see site plan and photographs)**

A brick culvert (019) was exposed in the south-western corner of room G24 measuring approximately 0.70m x 0.70m x 0.48m, it was also brick lined. A cast iron drainpipe (020) to the north, running down inside a cavity in the present day wall, must have originally discharged into the culvert.

### **Basement**

The basement floor was compacted with redeposited natural (014), with some patches of dark soil (015) beneath. Two courses of a wall (017) of red and green sandstone were observed in the floor of the basement, this wall was approximately 1.00m wide running roughly north south through rooms B05 and B04 and ending at the northern wall of room B03. A single piece of tufa was incorporated into the wall. What appeared to be a buttress (018) lay to the north-east of the wall (room B05) while a quantity of slate lay against the west side of the wall. Part of the brick and stone drainage system (028) was uncovered, running from the arched brick area (027) in the centre of room B04, into room B03.

### **Other Features**

**Cess Pit?** The tank-like cubicle marked on the plan as a 'disused well' is unlikely to be a well, although it has been traditionally considered to be one. The archaeological contractors have not entered the structure to examine the deposit which is visible from the entrance but the feature seems most likely to be a cess pit which would probably have served the whole building.

**Old Lavatory.** The remains of a lavatory in the basement were recorded during the archaeological evaluation (Monmouth Archaeology Report MA25.07 - May 2007). Fragments of the Victorian blue and white lavatory bowl were recovered.



**Carved Stone in the basement wall.** A white, fine-grained stone, carved with a raised circular border, has been set in one of the basement walls. Whatever was featured inside the raised border has been chipped away. The stone seems more likely to be Roman than later; it is not of a geologically local origin, being of a fine, unidentified but probably sedimentary stone which is inert to weak hydrochloric acid.

### **Frontage of The Shire Hall**

#### **Electricity trenches**

Solid iron slag (013), probably a road surface, was reached at 0.55m, above this lay red clay with mortar flecks which extended to a depth of 0.44m. The modern cobbles (010) which were set in black mortar (011) extended to a depth of 0.10m.

#### **Electricity trenches outside the building (See Section A-B)**

Monmouth Archaeological Society, wherever possible, have always monitored groundworks which have been outside the local planning authority's control, especially service trenches in the roads around the town. The Western Power electricity cable trench from the Shire Hall door in Agincourt Street, around the hoardings to enter the site in Agincourt Square near the Charles Rolls monument, was mainly outside the current refurbishment site. Consequently, with the help and cooperation of the groundwork contractors, the society voluntarily carried out a watching brief and a mitigation excavation during the work.

The results of the society's intervention were impressive, as the watching brief recovered material from the earliest Roman period up to modern times. A most important feature of the discoveries was that they provided evidence that Agincourt Square was inside the Pre-Flavian (First Century) Roman Fort which was previously only convincingly proved in Monnow Street.

Remains from Monmouth's later Roman industrial settlement, named as Blestium, superseded the Roman military period and was followed by the same sterile post-Roman ('Dark Age') layer which separates the Roman from the medieval context in much of Monmouth. An early Norman layer (late 11th or early 12th century) followed this. All of these deposits were sealed by a medieval road, mostly composed of iron slag, with traces of cobbles (of the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> centuries). These sequences were sealed by later road surfaces and deposits up to modern times.

As the service trenches were sloping upwards, the early medieval and Roman levels were not reached inside the area enclosed by the site hoardings.

### *Roman - The First Century*

A mitigation excavation was carried out in the trench at a point just before it turned the corner around the hoardings from Agincourt Street into Agincourt Square.

An area of darker brown clay and burnt daub (035) lying on the presumed natural horizon at 1.07m below the present road surface, produced an assemblage of Pre-Flavian pottery (see Finds Summary/Pottery Catalogue).

### *Norman – Late 11<sup>th</sup> / early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries*

A layer sealed by the medieval road produced a small but very informative group of Monmouth's First Phase medieval pottery (see Finds Summary/Pottery Catalogue).

### *Medieval and later*

Very little later medieval material was recovered and the road layers exposed during the mitigation excavation tended to merge with later ones, and so presenting a rather homogenous section.

## *The Contexts*

### **Community Room (G12)**

#### **Trial excavations on the west**

##### *Measurements below floor level*

- 001 Layer of compacted soil, clay, stone and lime.
- 002 Compacted surface(?) of pebbles and slag at 0.80m
- 003 Re-deposited natural clay to 1.00m
- 004 Humus at 1.00m continues beyond the depth of the trial excavations at 1.40m.

#### **Trial excavation in south east corner**

- 005 Layer of compacted soil, clay, stone and lime.
- 006 Rubble, soil etc to 0.50m.
- 007 Re-deposited natural clay depth.
- 008 Brown Humus at 0.80m below pavement level
- 009 Sandy lighter brown at 1.25m excavated to 1.35m.

### **Electricity trenches on the frontage**

- 010 Modern cobbled surface to 0.08m.
- 011 Black mortar setting for cobbles (010).
- 012 Red clay with mortar flecks to 0.44m.
- 013 Solid iron slag (road surface) to the bottom of the trench at 0.55m.

### **Basement Excavations**

- 014 Compacted re-deposited natural ?surface/floor.
- 015 Some dark soil beneath Context 014.

- 016 Natural clay.
- 017 Red and green sandstone wall with a single piece of tufa, running roughly north/south, with pinkish mortar with clay.
- 018 Possible buttress on the north eastern side of wall (017) – sandstone, soft brown sandy mortar.
- 027 Arched brick area in floor.
- 028 Section of brick and stone drain, running from Context 027.

### **Room G24**

- 019 Brick culvert approximately 0.70m x 0.70m x 0.48m, also brick lined.
- 020 Cast iron drainpipe running down inside a cavity in the present day wall, must have originally run into the culvert.

### **Rooms G01 and G22 (Earlier doorway)**

- 021 Sandstone wall on the west of the old doorway, some old plaster surviving on upper section of the wall.
- 022 Remains of rotten timbers above doorway.
- 023 Rough stone wall on east.
- 024 Remains of original eastern wall (two courses) below present floor level, with pieces of rotten timber, bone fragments and a carved stone
- 025 Rough stonework.

### **Room G23**

- 026 Old doorway revealed high up in corner of south-east wall of room G23.

### **Electricity Trenches outside the hoardings**

- 027 Tarmac.
- 028 Hardcore to approx 0.30m.

- 029 All iron slag to an average depth of 0.50m.
- 030 Boulder clay, some slag patches to 0.80m.
- 031 Slag, grey clay with some cobbles over Context 032 – medieval road surface.
- 032 Fawn to brown clay to approx. 1.00m.
- 033 Harder, dark brown clay with much charcoal.
- 034 Grey to brown clay at 1.10m.
- 035 Darker brown clay with burnt daub, sloping towards the west.
- 036 Natural sand and pebbles at approx. 1.18m.

### ***Conclusion and Discussion***

The results of Monmouth Archaeological Society's watching brief and mitigation excavation during groundworks in Agincourt Square and Agincourt Street for the Shire Hall services are very important. They show that Agincourt Square was inside the First Century Roman Fort and that later Roman, post-Roman, early Norman and later archaeological remains had survived there. The earlier deposits were sealed by a medieval road which pre-dated later road surfaces and deposits up to modern times. As the service trench excavations were sloping upwards, the early medieval and Roman levels were not reached inside the area enclosed by the site hoardings although they may well have survived there.

It seems very likely that some of the Roman levels remain undisturbed in Room G12 where they could have been protected by the various redeposited contexts. In most other areas of the site, the construction groundworks for the Shire Hall have probably have removed all of the pre-18<sup>th</sup> century archaeological resource.

## *The Finds Summary*

### Prehistoric

**Context 034** – Flint flake

### Roman

We are grateful to Dr. Peter Webster and Mr. A.L. Sockett for identifying the pottery and producing the ceramic report for the Roman period. The pottery is all First Century in date.

**Context 004** –

Three sherds of Roman Severn Valley Ware.

**Context 034** –

Two joining fragments of South Gaulish Samian, Form 15/16.

A South Gaulish Samian, Form 24/25, a small everted jar rim in oxidised fabric.

South Gaulish Samian, chip from a foot-ring, probably from a plate.

The 15/17 and the 24/25 suggest a pre -Flavian date.

A sherd of Southern Spanish olive oil amphora (Dressel 20).

Two sherds of Severn Valley Ware.

A sherd of Calcite gritted jar sherd with internal sooting, probably Roman.

A grey, jar sherd which is a fragment from jar in Context 035.

Burnt base of (Dressel 20 burnt).

Sherd of Samian with internal moulding.

**Context 035** –

Amphora ‘stopper’ fragment (Dressel 20).

Jar or flagon Terra Nigra or allied fabric – soft grey with smooth external surface and with a pale core in places. The wall is decorated with vertical lines made with a fine comb. The fabric is thin but not so thin as to be classed as ‘eggshell’. Nevertheless there is a resemblance to an Usk vessel in eggshell (Terra Nigra, Greene 1979, Fig. 52, 11. The Monmouth vessel retains a pedestal foot reminiscent of a vessel from Silchester, May 1916, no. 163. A shoulder fragment with the rouletted decoration may be from the same vessel but is more probably from a separate jar. Both are likely to date from the Neronian to early Flavian period.

**Context on the surface of natural 036** –

Samian, flanged bowl which has been trimmed so that only part of the flange survives. While an early Curle 11 is possible, it seems unlikely that the trimming could have removed all traces of the characteristic trailed leaves. Therefore, a bowl of Ritterling form 12, is probable, a mainly pre-Flavian form but with some examples surviving into the Flavian period C. AD 55-75.

The collection is small but consistent. Some disruption into the upper surface of Context 034 seems to be implied but otherwise datable Roman pottery seen here is pre-Flavian in date with no Roman pieces which need be later than this.

### *Norman – Late 11<sup>th</sup> / early 12<sup>th</sup> centuries*

#### **Context 032 –**

A layer (032) sealed by a medieval road produced a small but very informative group of Monmouth's First Phase medieval pottery which is dated to the late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century.

Fortuitously, there were four rims: a Cotswold Ware cooking pot rim from the Vale of Gloucester (Monmouth Fabric D2); an early style Malvernian cooking pot rim (Monmouth Fabric B1) and two cooking pot rims which appear to be of Monmouth A1 Fabric – probably the earliest pottery to be made west of the Severn after the fall of the Roman Empire.

### *Medieval and later*

**Context 001 –** Three blue and white ceramic sherds.

**Context 005 –** One transfer printed sherd.

**Context 034 –** Local cooking pot sherd, intrusive.

**Context 031 –** (above cobbles). – Odd sherds of Monmouth A3 cooking pottery.

## Catalogue of pottery

*The finds are catalogued in the contexts from which they were recovered.  
(See Appendix B for Medieval and Later Pottery)*

*Context 001*

*Bag 9*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric and Form</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Date.</i>	<i>Sherds</i>
001	Blue and White	G	19/20 <sup>th</sup> C	3

*Context 005*

*Bag 10*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric and Form</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Date.</i>	<i>Sherds</i>
005	Transfer printed	G	19/20 <sup>th</sup> C	1

*Context 004*

*Bag 1*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric and Form</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Date.</i>	<i>Sherds</i>
004	Severn Valley Ware	-	Roman	3

*Context 031*

*Bag 14*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric and Form</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Date.</i>	<i>Sherds</i>
031	Monnow Valley Ware cooking pottery	A3	Prob. 13 <sup>th</sup> C	3

*Context 032*

*Bag 8*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric and Form</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Date.</i>	<i>Sherds</i>
032	Cotswold Ware rim	D2	Late 11 <sup>th</sup> /Early 12 <sup>th</sup> C	1
032	Malvernian cooking pot rim	B1	Late 11 <sup>th</sup> /Early 12 <sup>th</sup> C	1
032	Local cooking pot rims	A1	Late 11 <sup>th</sup> /Early 12 <sup>th</sup> C	2

*Context 034*

*Bag 4*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric and Form</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Date.</i>	<i>Sherds</i>
034	Samian, Form 15/16, South Gaulish, two joining fragments	-	Roman	2
034	Samian, Form 24/25, South Gaulish	-	Roman	1



034	Small everted jar rim in oxidised fabric	-	Roman	1
034	Samian, South Gaulish foot-ring chip, prob. from a plate	-	Roman	1

*Context – Surface of 034*

*Bag 3*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric and Form</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Date.</i>	<i>Sherds</i>
034	South Spanish olive oil amphora, Dressel 20	-	Roman	1
034	Severn Valley Ware	-	Roman	2
034	Calcite gritted jar sherd	-	Prob. Roman	1
034	Grey jar sherd, fragment from Gallo-Belgic jar in Context 035	-	Roman	1
034	Cooking pot fragment (intrusive)	A3	Medieval	1

*Context – Bottom of 034*

*Bag 5*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric and Form</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Date.</i>	<i>Sherds</i>
009	Base of (Dressel 20, burnt)	-	Roman	1
009	Samian, internal moulding	-	Pre AD80	1

*Context 035*

*Bag 6*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric and Form</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Date.</i>	<i>Sherds</i>
009	Amphora 'stopper' fragment (Dressel 20)	-	Roman	1
009	Jar or flagon Terra Nigra or allied fabric	-	Roman	17
009	Flagon fragment in polished orange fabric	-	Roman	1

*Context on the surface of natural 036*

*Bag 7*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric and Form</i>	<i>Code</i>	<i>Date.</i>	<i>Sherds</i>
036	Samian, flanged bowl	-	c.AD 55-75	1

## **Other Finds**

*Context 015*

*Bag 2*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>No.</i>
015	Wine bottle base	18 <sup>th</sup> C	1
015	Clay pipe stem	18 <sup>th</sup> C	1

*Context 015*

*Bag 2*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>No.</i>
015	Wine bottle base	18 <sup>th</sup> C	1

*Context 034*

*Bag 4*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Item</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>No.</i>
034	Flint flake	Prehistoric	1

### **Bones**

(Not identifiable : Nid)

*Context 015*

*Bag 11*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Bone / Teeth</i>	<i>Number</i>
015	Sheep	Metacarpal	2
015	Bird	Various	10

*Context 024*

*Bag 12*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Bone / Teeth</i>	<i>Number</i>
024	Nids	-	3

*Context 032*

*Bag 13*

<i>Context</i>	<i>Species</i>	<i>Bone / Teeth</i>	<i>Number</i>
032	Pig	Tusk	1
032	Sheep	Tibia	1

### **Samples**

Slag samples were taken from Contexts 002, 013, 029, 031

*This report was compiled by  
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