

FLOODS

TABLE No. 1

Sites in Monnow Street where silt samples have been kept

	<i>Suggested Date</i>	<i>Method</i>
20 Monnow Street On Context 262 Below roof tiles Context		
22-24 Monnow Street Excavation	AD1315-1345	Archaeomag. Pottery/Position
43-47 Monnow Street : Peacocks trenches	Early 14 th Century	Pottery/Position Builders'
49 Monnow Street Hearth Section 2		
61-63 Monnow Street Context 418		
Hodges Builders' trench: Context 2	Early 14 th Century	Pottery/Position
66-68 Monnow Street Context B023		
69 Monnow Street On Context 262 On Hearth Context 226 Pockets on Context 224		
71 Monnow Street Hearth Context N170 Context 178		
75 Monnow Street Context		
83-85 Kwiksave Builders' trenches	Early 14 th Century	Position

95 Monnow Street

Builders' trenches: Context Early 14th Century Pottery/Position

No's 1-3 Monnow Bridge

Introduction

Many of the medieval houses that have been examined in Monnow Street have contained clean layers of fine sand and silt. These deposits have been explained by Monmouth archaeologists as being the result of flooding and they believe that this may have caused the residents to raise their house floors producing very impressive unbroken stratification.

One of the most impressive silt layers in the street and the one which is common to many sites has been reliably dated to the early 14th century. Dating has come from pottery in or below the silts supported by archaeomagnetism and by the nature and thickness of the layer and its regular position in the column of floors.

Flood deposits have been recorded on a dozen sites and samples are preserved from most of these. A list of these sites with the method of dating is given in Table 1.

Samples of most of these deposits have been subjected to microscopic study and analysis and this, together with their nature and position has shown that they were laid down during flooding.

The silts and fine sands had settled in still water inside buildings and are easily distinguished from riverside sands and from material imported by human action from elsewhere. All the listed contexts that are claimed to be flood deposits were 'cleanly' laid over underlying surfaces and were never mixed with the lower levels and only sometimes disturbed from above at a later time.

Some of the flood levels, especially those of the 14th century, are closely associated with evidence of abandonment—broken roofing materials, broken pottery and layers of burning. It has yet to be established if the flood silts had accumulated during an extended abandonment of the houses or if they were dropped during a short evacuation of the sites.

Experiments are taking place to see how long

Distinguishing flood silts

All sediments close to the Monmouth rivers or on the river banks that have been left by floods contain numerous sand grains over 0.5mm and sometimes much larger. The larger of these sands can only be kept in suspension by fast moving water. As the flood plains are inundated the movement slows and this leads to the loss of the larger grains until only silts remain. This is the cause of the defined levees close to the river banks.

By the time the flooding reached the Monnow Street houses the water would have been very slow moving and inside the houses it would have been stationary. This was witnessed by one of the authors in 1963 when he and a friend were landed on the Monnow Bridge by a boat from Drybridge Street

before catching the Army boat service up Monnow Street. The bridge was like an island while a sea of still muddy brown water stretched away in all directions.

Despite numerous sampling on sites all around Monmouth it has proved impossible to obtain sediments as fine as those lying in layers on the floors of the medieval houses of Monnow Street. The results of the microscopic examination of the samples listed are given in Table 2. Every one of the samples studied were deposited in still water inside the building where the sample was taken.

The absence of bands of floated debris such as charcoal or other organic material inside the layers may be evidence that the sediments were laid down during a single large or long flood. A series of inundations should have exhibited distinct fossilised horizons as were noted during silting from the spoil heaps at the Beaufort Court, Monmouth (Clarke, S. et al, 2002). In this case each drying out of the silt after one of the numerous winter rainstorms produced a thin but clearly defined layer. These were not recognised in the Monnow Street silts. CCCCheck this
The grain sizes

1-3 Monnow Bridge

Hearth Context N170
Context 178

Mostly 0.02mm/0.03mm (up to 0.5mm rare)

75 Monnow Street
Context

83-85 Kwiksave

Builders' trenches

95 Monnow Street

Builders' trenches: Context

No's 1-3 Monnow Bridge

These suggestions have recently been challenged (Marvell, AG, 2001).

