

EXCAVATIONS AT OLD MARKET STREET, USK

by Vivienne Metcalf-Dickinson

This report concerns Medieval and later activity on the site of 10 Old Market Street, Usk. It is hoped that the Romano-British occupation of the site will be published in a forthcoming number of the Cambrian Archaeological Association Monographs and Collections.

Site and Situation Fig. 5.

Usk is a small market town in the county of Gwent (OS 376 007) on the East bank of the Usk at its confluence with the river Olway, and on the flood plain of both rivers. It lies at a height of c. 17m. O.D., on a major bridging point of the Usk river, commanding a natural North - South routeway following the river valley.

Geologically, Usk lies within the Old Red Sandstone region, situated on the estuarine alluvium of the river valley, with gravel terraces occurring beyond Llanbadoc to the South. To the North and West, limestones of the Upper Ludlow beds outcrop; Usk Castle is built on the limestone heights to the North of the town. To the North-east and South-west of the town the Raglan Marl group occurs; to the East and South-east the river valley is flanked by Old Red sandstones, which have been much utilised for building material. The soils within the town are silts, sands and gravels and clays derived from the above.

The first settlement known at Usk was of Romano-British date, though flint implements from the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Ages were recovered during the excavation. Usk town was first mentioned in 1131¹, and was a flourishing community in the Medieval period, with 296 burgages in 1314. A charter was granted to the town by Elizabeth de Burgh, and confirmed by her grandson, Roger Mortimer,

Earl of March, on 26th July, 1397. The document was lost in the Glyndwr uprising, and the charter was reconfirmed by Roger's son Edmund on 1st February, 1416. The town was attacked twice by Glyndwr; in 1402, when much of it was destroyed by fire, and again in 1405. A market place was granted to Usk by the Earl of Pembroke on 5th July, 1598, and it was probably at about this time that the distinction between 'Old' and 'New' Market Streets began to be made.

The Castle, originally belonging to the de Clare family, was first recorded in 1173, though it was probably of almost contemporary construction with the Benedictine Priory; the latter was a house of nuns founded by Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke, c. 1120-1130, though the church could be as early as the eleventh century. The Priory was dissolved in 1536, and the remaining buildings and approximately six acres of land were sold to one Roger Williams of Usk in 1544/5, for £168 8s 4d. His great-grandson, Sir Trevor Williams of Llangibby Castle three miles to the South, took Usk Castle and town for Parliament in 1646, though he had earlier supported the King. He later returned to the Royalist cause.

The Excavation O.S. SO 3764 0062

In February and March, 1979 the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust undertook a six-week season of trial excavations on a plot of land adjacent to 10 Old Market Street, Usk, and at Maryport Street Car Park, Usk². The areas were scheduled for redevelopment as part of a major infill development programme proposed for the central area of Usk by Monmouth District Council. Usk is an archaeologically sensitive area, both as one of the historic small

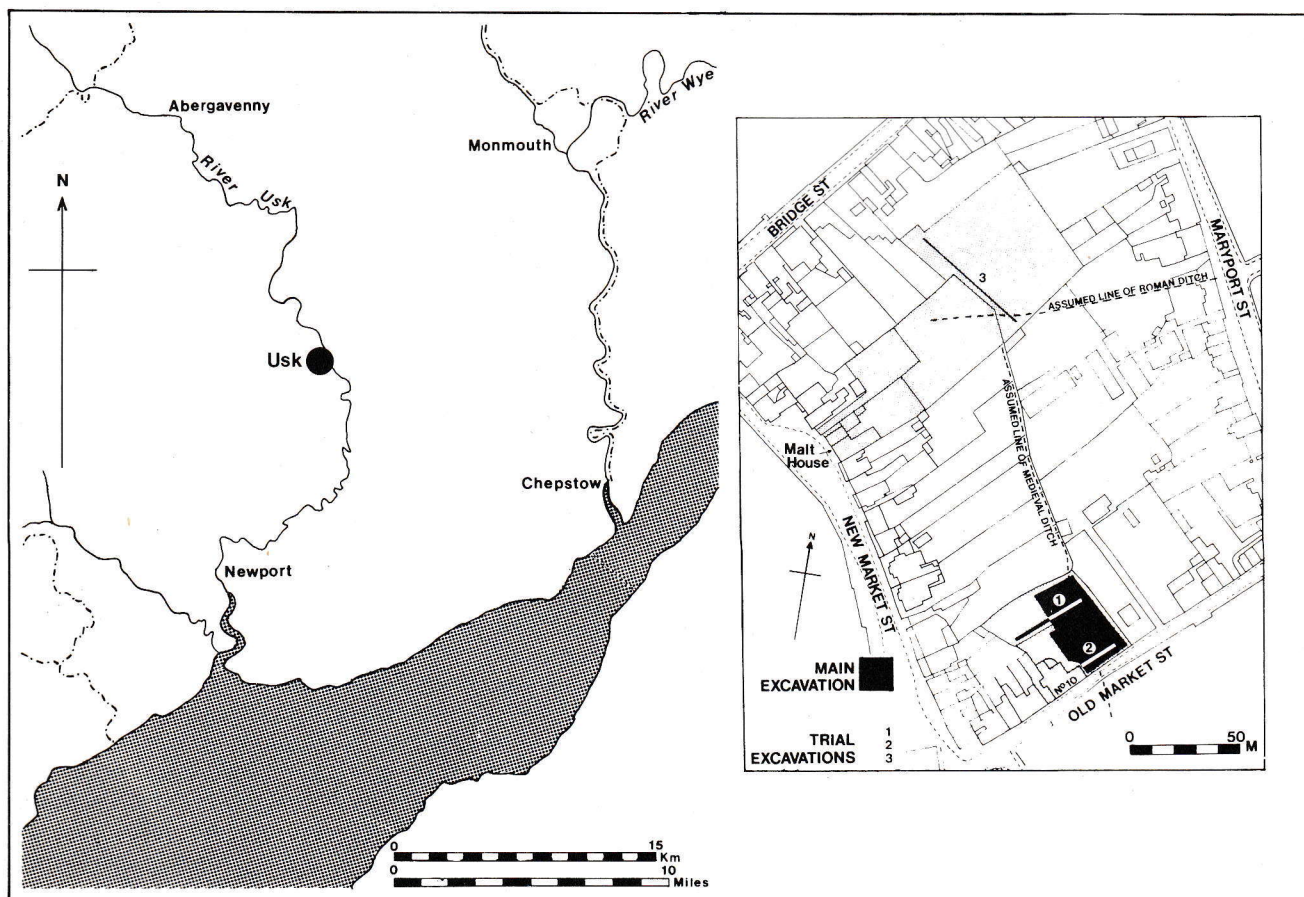


Fig. 5 Location plan, showing true North

THE ANIMAL BONE

by Gillian G. Jones

The animal bones from Usk were mainly from contexts of seventeenth century date, chiefly levelling up dumps and rubbish pits, the use of the site being domestic, with some metal and bone working activity.

The bone sample was looked at briefly, owing to constraints of time and finance. The following information was recorded: numbers of fragments of each species, age data of lower jaws where at least one tooth was present, measurements of complete bones and a limited number of measurements of incomplete bones, and signs of disease, bone working, etc. Lack of detailed analysis of the bone sample limits interpretation, for example in studying differences within the site and biases towards deposition/recovery of different parts of the skeleton (for discussion see Maltby 1981).

Table 1. Species present

Cattle	1139	65%	Fallow deer	5
Sheep (goat)	313	18%	Cat	3+1*
Pig	189+1*	11%	Hare	2 ²⁹⁰⁷¹
Horse	60+1*	3.5%	Goose	1
Dog	16+2*	1%	Fowl	6
			Duck	1 ³
Other species		1.5%	Oyster	[9] ³⁷

* partial skeleton

Cattle

The proportion of cattle bones found shows that the Usk valley was predominantly cattle rearing country, as it appears to have been both in Roman and medieval times, further down the valley at Caerleon (O'Connor, forthcoming). A large collection of cannon bones gave an estimated average shoulder height of 1.11m (3' 7") (Range 0.99-1.26m, sample size 73, method of Fock using a factor intermediate between cow and steer, Driesch and Boessneck, 1974). The cattle were little larger than the small Roman cattle from Exeter (Maltby 1979), of similar size to those from Medieval Oxford (Wilson, 1981) and noticeably smaller than those from late Saxon Hamwih (Bourdillon and Coy 1980). At Caerleon there was evidence that the medieval cattle were somewhat smaller than the Roman; data from metapodial bones from both periods fall mostly within the range of measurements at Usk. It appears that during medieval to post-medieval times the range of size increased, some larger cattle being present.

Information about the age at death of the cattle shows the most common age distribution on medieval and earlier sites, where cattle were needed for work, breeding and milk, with little surplus to provide young carcasses for the market. At Usk 72% of jaws recovered were from

Table 2. Age Date. Mandibles

	Cattle	Sheep	Pig
1 Birth — M1 in wear	2	0	0
2 — M2 in wear	1	0	8
3 M3 in wear	3	3	11
4 M3 in partial wear	3	5	4
5 M3 in full wear	17	4	3
6 M3 in heavy wear	6	0	4

M1 lower first molar tooth.

Method described fully in Bourdillon and Coy 1980, p. 86 and fig. 17.

fully adult cattle (Table 2). Immature jaws included two calves (stage 1), which raises the possibility, especially in a town site, that calves were slaughtered for vellum. As far as could be seen, the jaws were healthy. Absence of the second premolar was not observed (sample size 13). In one case the lower third molar had only two sections; fifteen had the normal three sections.

Signs of pathology were few. A horn core had two shallow depressions of the inner curve, basally. They are probably nutritional in origin, suggesting occasional difficulties in over-wintering the cattle herd. Johnson, in his travels in Scotland in the 18th century, observed that the cattle barely survived the winter. A metatarsal had a small round swelling, c. 14mm across, on the shaft, on the medial proximal side. In another metatarsal the two distal condyles were of unequal size, the medial one being splayed out. A similar case from medieval Walton, Buckinghamshire described by Noddle (1976, 286, Pl. VIII) 'was probably the result of heavy traction such as might be carried out by a plough ox'.

The collection of cattle bones was striking for the number of complete cannon bones (metacarpals and metatarsals) found. In the drainage gully associated with House B, 63 out of 146 cattle bone fragments were cannon bones, including 14 complete bones. In four instances the sawn off end of a cannon bone was found. It would be interesting to know what saw was being used — it appeared not to have been very sharp. The cuts were not so clean and parallel as those seen on similar material at late Saxon Thetford (Jones, forthcoming). In one case, a metacarpal has been sawn through below the proximal end, the flat ventral part has been sawn off, giving a flattish piece of bone about 70 x 27 x 6mm, leaving intact the dorsal part of the shaft plus the distal end. The saw used left a blade gap 1.4mm thick. Even without more detailed analysis, it seems likely that bone working was taking place on the site.

Sheep

The deposits studied at Usk contained only 18% sheep bones, and in particular there were few mandibles, only twelve, in comparison with thirty-two of cattle and thirty of pig. Evidence of age at death suggests that most sheep meat eaten was mutton, no jaws surviving from animals less than about two years old. Measurements are given in Table 3. The sheep were of similar stature to their medieval predecessors.

No certain evidence of the presence of goat was found, although one first phalanx was probably goat, judging from the size (GLpe 42, Bp 13.1mm) and shape (Boessneck *et al* 1964). Horn cores were from sheep, probably one ewe and three males (rams or wethers). One fragmentary skull survived with a very small horn core (about 2cm long). A polled sheep was found in a 12th–13th century deposit at Caerleon (O'Connor, forthcoming).

Pig

Pig bones were well represented and included thirty lower jaws. Eleven of these were from adult or nearly adult pigs, more than three years old. No signs of dental disease or overcrowding of the teeth were observed. The few measurable bones included three lower third molars, all of domestic pig size (Length 28.1, 30.5, 30.5).

The skeleton of a male pig which died at about a year old, was found in a demolition deposit. All bone elements were unfused except the following: the distal humerus (partly fused), proximal radius and the acetabulum of the pelvis. The lower jaw was at Stage 3, the lower second molar showing enamel wear only. Signs of neither butchery nor disease were observed.

Horse

One of the rubbish pits contained part of a horse skeleton. The horse was about 13½ hands (average of 9 measurements, given on Table 3, method of Kiesewalter, in Driesch and Boessneck 1974) and died when only about six years old, judging from the wear on the incisor teeth and the lack of complete fusion of the vertebral epiphyses.

There was considerable pathological alteration on the spine; the third and second last thoracic vertebrae were fused along the spinous processes and there was a slight growth of bone by the lip of the articulations. Similarly fused were the last thoracic and the first lumbar; the anterior end of the body of the last thoracic was also abnormal. There was ossification of part of the inter-vertebral cartilage on the upper half of the articulatory surface. Further down the backbone, the second and third lumbar vertebrae were fused by an exostosis chiefly on the third lumbar, on the ventral/lateral part of the centrum.

It seems likely that the condition described, in a horse which was not old, is the result of injury or excessive stress, perhaps caused by the animal having been broken in for work too soon.

Horse bones were found in sixteen different features, mostly as single bones, and totalled 3.5% of the bone sample. No butchery marks were observed, either on the skeleton or on the other horse bones. Seven complete long bones give estimated heights of 13 hands (3 cases), 13½ (2 cases), 14 and 15 hands (see Table 3).

Dog

Partial skeletons of two dogs were found, both of them showing signs of disease. The first animal was large, with an estimated shoulder height of 66cm (2' 2") (method of Harcourt, 1974). The dog died when quite old; muscle attachments on the long bones were marked and the teeth were well worn. The lower jaw on one side was affected by periodontal disease, which is fairly unusual in carnivores. The area of bone below the fourth premolar and the second molar was swollen on the lingual side and there was an opening 4 x 3 mm in the alveolar border exposing the posterior root of the carnassial, on the buccal side (Plate 10). Radiography of the bone showed no abscess cavity. Measurements: Greatest length of humerus 201, radius c. 198mm.

The second dog was more complete than the above. Measurement of five long bones give a shoulder height estimate of 59cm (1' 11"). The teeth were very worn. The right femur was deformed (Plate 11). The proximal end was normal but the lower two-thirds of the shaft was swollen. The distal articulation was twisted out of alignment and was much altered. The right tibia and patella did not survive. The dog must have been lame but evidently lived some time with its lameness. Measurements: Greatest lengths — humerus 178, 179; radius 197, 179; tibia 196.

Other dog bones included one immature metapodial bone, a humerus from a smaller dog (breadth of distal end 23.8) and a humerus which had an extra growth of bone on the Teres eminence. An injury to the Teres muscle, which joins the humerus and scapula, may have been the cause.

Other Species

Bones of other species were uncommon. Three cat bones, from isolated contexts were all immature. The partial skeleton was of late 17th or early 18th century date. It was just adult, fusion lines being visible on the long bones. The only part of the skull to survive was one mandible, with anomalous dentition. The second premolar is duplicated, the two teeth being joined at the adjacent roots and set at an irregular angle in the jaw. (Measurements: humerus GL

87, 87; tibia 99, 99.) Presence of extra teeth occurs fairly commonly in the Carnivora (Baker and Brothwell 1980) although as far as the writer is aware, it has not previously been recorded in early examples of cat.

Bird bones included domestic fowl and goose (*Anser anser* probably domestic). An immature bird bone was probably duck, *Anas platyrhynchos*. (The assistance of Mr. G. Cowles in using the ornithological collections at the British Museum (Natural History), Tring, is gratefully acknowledged.) It was interesting that five bones of fallow deer were found (all metapodial bones, GL metacarpal 178, metatarsal 201, 204), with no bones of red or roe deer. Hare may have been hunted or trapped. Oyster shells were the only sign of use being made of the river or sea.

Table 3. Summary of Measurements

Cattle		N	Range	Mean	S.D.
Horn core	L outer curve		107, 140, 158, 185		
	Basal circumf.	9	108 — 187	157	
Humerus	B Trochlea	8	63 — 72	66.0	
Metacarpal	G Length	42	161 — 201	180.7	8.6
	B proximal	33	44.3 — 59.4	51.3	3.9
	Shaft Diam.	41	23.5 — 35.5	29.7	3.2
	B distal	38	46.9 — 63.6	53.5	4.1
Metatarsal	GL	31	193 — 231	209.4	8.8
	Breadth p	26	37.5 — 51.0	43.5	2.9
	SD	31	21.5 — 29.0	24.7	1.9
	Bd	27	44.5 — 56.3	50.1	3.6

Sheep

Horn core	L outer curve/ bas. cir.		77/76, 75/70(pair) c. 135/c.125 — /158		
Humerus	BT	7	29 — 32	28.3	
Radius	Bp	7	26.5 — 30.5	29.1	
Tibia	Bd	13	22 — 26.5	24.7	
Metacarpal	GL/Bp/SD/Bd		115/23.5/15.0/27.5		
Metatarsal	GL/Bp/SD/Bd		127/18.0/11.0/22.0 134/22.0/12.5/27.0 139/20.5/11.5/24.5		

Horse

Humerus	GL to Caput/Bt		295/77		
Radius	K/Bp/SD/Bd		319/77 /37.5/ — 328/— /41.5/77 346/84 /40.7/80 307/— /49 /66		
Tibia	K/Bp/SD/Bd		224/46.5/31.5/46.5		
Metacarpal	K/Bp/SD/Bd		209/45.0/30.8/44.9 253/44.0/27.9/44.9		
Metatarsal	K/Bp/SD/Bd				
Skeleton, Pit	704.				
Mandible	Cheek tooth row		169		
Radius	K/Bp/SD/Bd		331/76 /39.0/72 332/78 /37.0/72		
Femur	K/GLC		401/367		
Tibia	K/Bp/SD/Bd		328/— /41 /66 327/88 /42 /67		
Metacrap.	K/Bp/SD/Bd		213/49.5/35.5/43.5 215/49.8/35.6/46.1		
Metatars.	K/Bp/SD.Bd		257/48.0/32.5/46.0 260/47.4/31.7/47.2		

Measuring points defined in von den Driesch 1976, except K — Lengths defined by Kiesewalter.

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