

## **Finds from the 2004 Excavations at 213-225 High Street, Elgin (Marks & Spencer site)**

### **Murray Archaeological Services**

The finds on display here were all excavated from the site of 213-225 High Street, Elgin – formerly known as Nicholson's Garage and now home to Marks & Spencer (M&S) – in 2004. Previous archaeological investigations in the vicinity had indicated the potential for survival of earlier evidence of human activity, despite later (18th - 19th Century) redevelopment of the site. Murray Archaeological Services (MAS) undertook an archaeological watching brief over the site in April 2004 prior to the M&S development, followed soon after by an archaeological excavation. Features and artefacts dating from the medieval period were recorded, covering a period from the 12th to 15th Centuries. Of particular interest were two timber-lined wells, dug to below the water table with silt filters at their bases. The waterlogged conditions preserved not only the timber of the structures but also resulted in extraordinary preserved of organic materials: leather, wood, bone, alongside other "medieval rubbish" such as broken pottery. Analysis of environmental samples provided evidence of food being consumed: grains of barley and wheat, seeds of fig, raspberry/bramble, grape pip, a hazelnut shell and a plum stone. Analysis of samples from an oven feature (F111) showed it was used for baking and/or brewing/heating water.

Wells and water cisterns (sealed containers to store water) would have been common in the medieval period, for both household and industrial uses. When they collapsed or became contaminated, the wells and pits were reused as rubbish or cess pits.

From well 1 (F12): leather shoe fragments dated to 13th-15th Century and a wooden dowl. Pottery was mainly Scottish Redware, with some Greyware, 13th-14th Century in date, and mainly from jugs. Animal bone, horn cores and antlers.

From well 2 (F1): The well is thought to be of late 12th – early 13th Century construction. The objects deposited in are later in date, the well have been infilled after going out of use. Leather shoe fragments dated to 14th-15th Century and part of a wooden solid tripartite wheel. More than 100 pottery sherds were removed from well 2, almost all of Scottish Redware type including fragments from 15 jugs of 13th-14th Century date. Animal bone, horn cores and antlers.

### **1. Leather Shoe Sole (sf3, F1/11)**

Dated to 14th-15th Century AD. Comparable with finds made during excavations in Perth and Aberdeen. Of turnshoe construction, where a single sole is attached by an edge-flesh seam to the lasting margin. The shoe is made inside out and then turned the right way right so that the seam is on the inside. From Well 2.

### **2. Willow Toggle (sf16 F1/16)**

L58mm, Diameter 24mm. From Well 2.

### **3. Oak Disk or Pot Lid (sf45 F1/12)**

L270mm W174mm Thickness 11mm. From Well 2.

### **4. Hazel Roofing Peg (sf15 F1/16)**

L62mm W14mm Thickness 12mm. From Well 2.

### **5. Leather Shoe Upper (sf29 F1/16)**

Shoe upper belonging to a shoe with a central opening at the vamp throat. A low shoe, of one-piece wrap around design, but with an insert on the inside of the foot, between vamp wing and quarters. One of the stitching channels is unusually near the toe, suggesting a possible repair. From Well 2.

### **6. Pottery ELG F1 1/4**

Clear green-glazed redware body sherd, from a jug. Decorated with incised horizontal and diagonal lines; base of hand visible. From Well 2.

### **7. Pottery ELG F1/12 (two pieces)**

L: Green-glazed redware upright rim, from a jug.

R: Green-glazed redware strap handle with thumb base, from a jug.

From Well 2.

### **8. Pottery ELG 1 F1/16 (five pieces)**

Redware jug fragments, 5 pieces of rim and handle fitting together. A small jug with a slightly pinched spout. See photo of this immediately after excavation. From Well 2.

### **9. Pottery ELG F133/2**

Rim sherd of unglazed greyware bowl. From F133, a trench or linear feature, which included a lot of bone material in the fill.

### **10. Pottery ELG 1 F125/1-3 (one piece), F125/3 (three pieces)**

Green-glazed redware twisted rod handle fragment from a jug (F125/1-3); three sherds of green-glazed redware (F125/3) with raised decoration. From F125, a pit measuring approx. 1.5m x 0.7m deep.

### **11. Pottery ELG 1 125/1-3 (two pieces)**

Two sherds of pottery, fitting together. Green-glazed greyware jug handle with thumbprint decoration. From F125, a pit measuring approx. 1.5m x 0.7m deep.

### **12. Cattle Bones and Horn Cores (F12/3)**

Finds bag filled with cattle horn cores and cattle bones. The presence of significant amounts of cattle horn cores (the inner part of a cow's horn) is taken to indicate that horn working was being carried out on or near this site. As an inexpensive and abundant material horn was used to make everyday household articles such as spoons, beakers, combs and even to screen candles (the term *lanthorn* becoming *lantern* over time) and for windowpanes. From Well 1.

### 13. Antler Fragment (F36/1)

Antler fragment, worked. The presence of this piece of antler shows signs of having been worked, antler being a material used for, amongst other things, utensil and tool handles, toggles and buttons. Although found on the High Street, the residents here would not have been eating venison – consumption of deer as a food source was restricted to the elite of high society. Those living at or visiting Elgin Castle would certainly have eaten venison, but those on the High Street would have been eating goat, sheep, pork and beef, as well as fish and shellfish. From F36, a pit measuring 1.02m x 0.4m deep. This pit contained high quantities of bone, burnt bone and this large fragment of antler.

### 14. Fragment of a Wooden Wheel (sf8 F1/11)

Central plank from a solid tripartite wheel, made of Alder wood (*Alnus spp*) with Oak pegs (*Quercus spp*). L 655mm, W 267mm, Thickness 122mm. See image below which shows how the tripartite wheel would have been constructed.

The wheel has been subject to conservation and remedial repair to stabilise it. From Well 2.

#### TRIPARTITE WHEEL

The tripartite wheel is the common primitive type of wheel. It is still used in many parts of the world, well fitting for rough soils and in a degraded state.

#### MOBILE DISK

The mobile disk consists of three sections of wood held together by transoms.



Image taken from: <https://www.alamy.com/infographics-of-the-mechanics-of-a-tripartite-wheel-the-application-of-the-wheel-in-machines-and-evolution-since-its-invention-adobe-illustrator-ai-2480x3248-image525184575.html>



Photo of 8, Small Jug – five pieces fitting together

### **More information**

Moray Historic Environment Record NJ26SW0185

(Visit <https://online.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/smrpub> , select “Moray” and enter the above reference in the Primary reference field)

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