

CPAT Report No. 1366

Price's Pottery, Buckley, Flintshire

Archaeological Investigations 2015





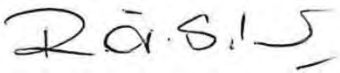
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CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

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Prepared by:	Checked by:	Approved by:
 V Culshaw		
Sophie Watson Project Archaeologist Viviana Culshaw Community Archaeologist	Nigel Jones Senior Project Archaeologist	Bob Silvester Head of Field Services
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Cover photo: 2015 Excavation Trench

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Summary

The area surrounding Buckley in Flintshire, has been associated with the production of pottery for at least 600 years, from the medieval period to the mid-20th century. The scale and location of pottery manufacture during the Middle Ages and through the Tudor period is poorly known, but by the early 17th century a group of cottage potters had settled around Buckley Mountain where they exploited the suitable supplies of clay, coal and, on Halkyn Mountain, lead. Potteries were often established on encroachments on common land, which can be readily identified in 18th- and 19th-century cartographic sources.

The significance of the Buckley pottery industry has been recognised for some time, attracting considerable attention, although it is only relatively recently that a comprehensive review has been conducted, employing historic cartography and the results of previous work. Currently, some 31 sites have been identified, although several are not well located.

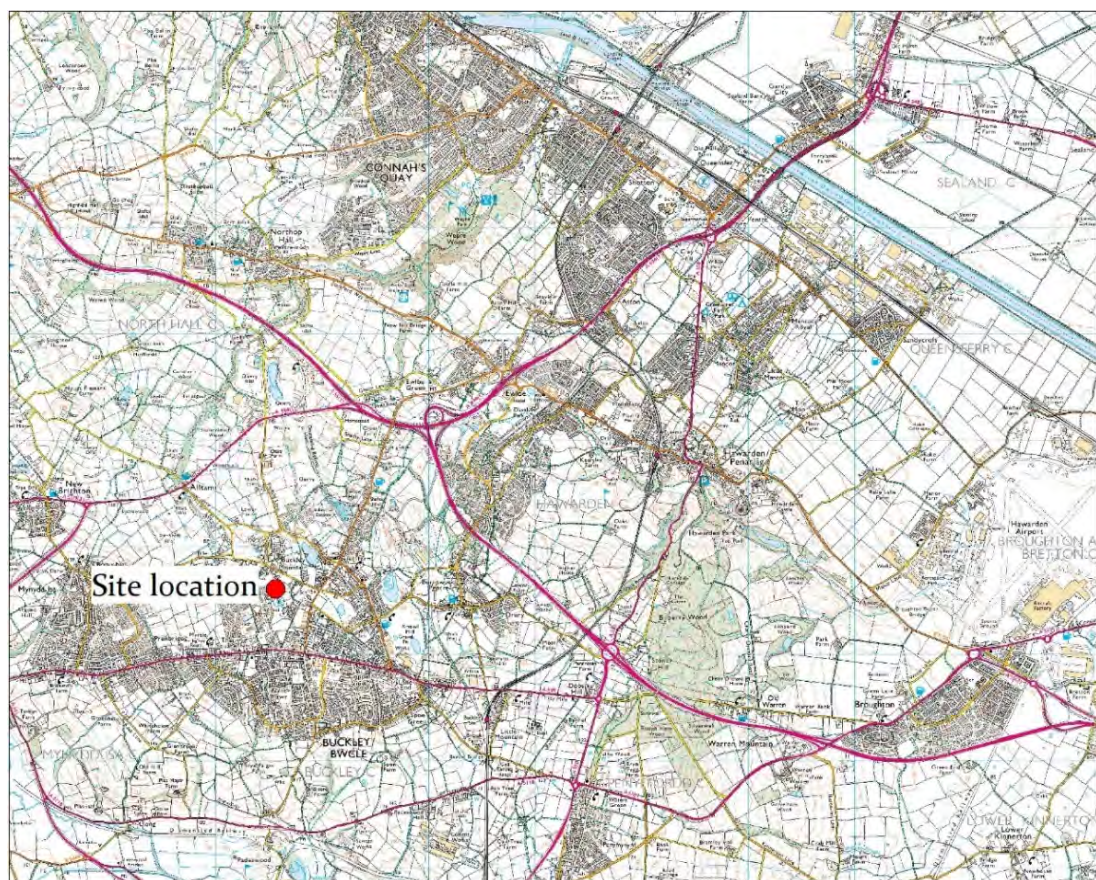
Despite the extent and significance of the industry there are now few visible surface traces. Although there have been some remarkable survivals, the Buckley area has seen considerable new development in the last 20 years, such that most significant elements of the pottery industry have already been lost. Price's Pottery, the site of which is the subject of this report, is a case in point, having been seriously affected by housing developments and the landscaping of the grounds for Elfed High School.

Two seasons of excavation have been completed at the site of Price's Pottery, at the start of which it was not known whether any evidence for the pottery remained. Some features relating to the pottery were revealed by the excavations, though there were few in-situ structures or features, apart from two pits, one of which may be a backfilled blunging pit. Large quantities of pottery debris and associated material were collected and it is hoped that analysis of these finds will provide valuable information on both the products of the pottery and the period of its operation.

The project was funded by Cadw and was conceived as one where the archaeological gains from the excavation would be matched by the value of involving the community in discovering its past. This included liaising with the Buckley Society, a local history group dedicated to recording and transmitting the history of the locality, but the main way in which the project aims were achieved was by involving students from Elfed High School in all aspects of the work. This included map regression, finds processing and excavation, tasks which gave both themselves and the teaching staff an understanding of the nature of the industry that once provided such a major contribution to the local economy. This was highly successful, as demonstrated by the feedback from the school, but the students also transmitted information about their involvement to their parents and friends, widening the range of contact to the community as a whole; as part of this process one of the students discovered that her family were descended from the original owners of the pottery. Furthermore, students of Elfed High School entered the 2014 Welsh Heritage School Initiative competition and in July 2015 they were awarded a prize by a panel of professionals in Cardiff for their involvement with the excavations at Price's Pottery.

1 Introduction

- 1.1. Following on from the 2014 excavation at the site of the former Price's Pottery in Buckley, Flintshire (SJ 2755 6460), the Field Services Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (CPAT) carried out further investigations in June 2015. The work was carried out in that part of the pottery site which lies within the grounds of Elfed High School and was carried out with the assistance of the students, local volunteers and community groups. The programme was grant-aided by Cadw.
- 1.2. The work followed a programme of assessment (Jones 2014), which had identified some 31 pottery sites in the vicinity of Buckley. Price's Pottery was chosen as a suitable site for a trial excavation, although it was known that some elements of the pottery had been lost during the landscaping of the school grounds in the 1970s and when a small housing development was constructed on the adjoining land.



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Fig. 1: Site Location

2 Historical Background

- 2.1. The 1757 Lordship of Ewloe map shows two rectangular buildings which equate with those of the pottery shown on the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 25" map of 1884, although no kiln is depicted to confirm this as a pottery in 1757. A pottery is recorded here on the 1780s' Ewloe Estate maps and appears to have been operational until the later part of the 19th century, being disused by the time the 2nd edition Ordnance Survey mapping was produced in 1899.
- 2.2. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey mapping of 1884 shows a single kiln and two buildings, as well as a small pond immediately to the north. The pottery was operated by Charles Price in the later 18th century and he was succeeded by his widow Martha and later his son Charles (Messham 1956, 34).
- 2.3. The site lies on the edge of the playing field of Elfed High School and in the 1970s works here led to considerable erosion of the pottery dump on its south and west sides. A quantity of 18th- to 19th-century pottery and kiln furniture was recovered, including a number of very fine mottled ware tankards (Davey 1976a, 23).

3 Summary of the 2014 excavation

- 3.1. The 2014 excavation (Hankinson and Culshaw, 2014) was designed to assess the survival of the pottery buildings depicted on the 1884 Ordnance Survey map (see Fig. 2) and also determine whether material could be collected to ascertain both how long the pottery had been in operation and the nature of its products. An important consideration was to facilitate the involvement of the local community with the work and, in particular, allow the pupils of Elfed High School and local interest groups the opportunity to understand the history of Buckley and its importance as a centre of pottery manufacture.
- 3.2. The 2014 excavation comprised a single trench measuring 34.4m long by about 1.2m wide, which was positioned just inside the boundary of the school grounds, to the south of a modern housing development. Natural subsoil (9) appeared as a hard yellow clay and in places this sloped down to the south and bore marks indicative of machine excavation, clearly a result of the landscaping of the school playing fields in the 1970s.

Sondage A
- 3.3. The sondage was located 7m from the west end of the 2014 excavation trench; its base was occupied by two layers which appeared to butt each other; on the north was a brown silt (16), while on the south there was a loose deposit of coal, and fired clay fragments in an orange-grey silt (18). Layer 16 had a very similar appearance to layer 6 and probably represented a former surface or near-surface soil horizon; these layers are likely to date to the time the pottery was in operation.
- 3.4. Layers 16 and 18 were covered by a layer of coal fragments (15), about 0.1m thick, itself covered by a thinner layer of loose and powdery orange, fired clay (14), up to 0.05m thick. The fired clay had the same appearance and constituents as layer (8). Above 14 was another coal layer (7), about 50mm thick, which formed a spread of material, presumably also associated with the kiln. A further spread of coal (5), no

more than 50mm thick, lay towards the western end of the trench and also overlay the brown silt (16), suggesting that it was broadly contemporary with layer 15. On the south side of the trench there was a loose, greyish-brown, mixed deposit of coal, slag and silt (17), up to 0.18m thick, covering the slope created by the 1970s' landscaping, with which it was no doubt contemporary.

- 3.5. A short distance to the west of Sondage A, some 5m from the end of the excavation, the trench was crossed by a narrow linear gully (3), between 0.3m and 0.4m wide and up to 0.25m deep, and on a north-north-east/south-south-west alignment. The gully was largely filled with lumps of slag within a greyish-brown sandy silt (4); the slag was relatively light in weight and had probably originated from the pottery kiln. The function of the gully could not be confirmed but it may have been a drainage feature and it cut through a layer of brown silt (6), up to 0.25m thick, and possibly into the top of the natural subsoil (9).

Sondage B

- 3.6. The sondage was excavated to examine a layer of loose and powdery orange fired clay (8), which was apparent beneath the modern surface soil, and found to be directly over a brown silt (6), probably representing an old surface or near-surface soil horizon. The upper few centimetres of layer 8 were removed to confirm its relationship to layer 6 and to allow some of the pottery waste which it contained to be recovered, but its depth was not established. The limited intervention ensured that the layer retained a coherent appearance should further work be contemplated here in the future. Some of the fragments of pottery from layer 8 had clearly belonged to wasters (pots which had failed in the firing).

Sondage C

- 3.7. This sondage was placed 14m from the east end of the trench and revealed little of significance. The natural clay subsoil (9) was overlain by a disturbed layer of mixed yellow clay and grey-brown silt (10), approximately 0.15m thick, probably representing activity related to the 1970s' landscaping. The southern side of layer 9 sloped down markedly to the south, where it had been cut back by the landscaping.

Sondage D

- 3.8. The sondage was placed about 4.5m from the east end of the trench. It revealed a somewhat mixed layer of yellow-brown and dark grey sandy clay and silt (13), overlying the natural clay (19). A raised lump of stiff grey-brown clay (12) overlay layer 13 and was itself covered by a mixed clay (11), of orange, yellow-brown and grey colour; the former was fairly clean and may be clay that was acquired by the pottery but went unused, while the latter contained fired ceramic material, some of which was reminiscent of kiln waste. We may speculate that the clay at this site supplied raw material for the pottery and was the impetus for the development of the pottery at this location.
- 3.9. It is assumed that layers 11-13 were contemporary with activity at the pottery, although the circumstances of their deposition remain uncertain owing to the small area investigated. The natural clay here was found at a significantly lower level than in the remainder of the trench, which implied that the ground level in this area, potentially within one of the pottery buildings, had been lowered by about 0.5m. Layers 11-13 were covered by a disturbed layer of mixed yellow clay and grey-brown

silt (10), approximately 0.15m thick, which seems likely to be related to the landscaping of the school playing fields in the 1970s.

- 3.10. Two relatively modern soils were identified which covered the deposits described above. The surface soil was a grey-brown silt (1), from 0.1m to 0.3m thick, which was present throughout the trench. Beneath this in the eastern and central parts of the trench there was a dark grey-brown crumbly silt (2), up to 0.1m thick. Large quantities of pottery and associated material were recovered from these two layers.

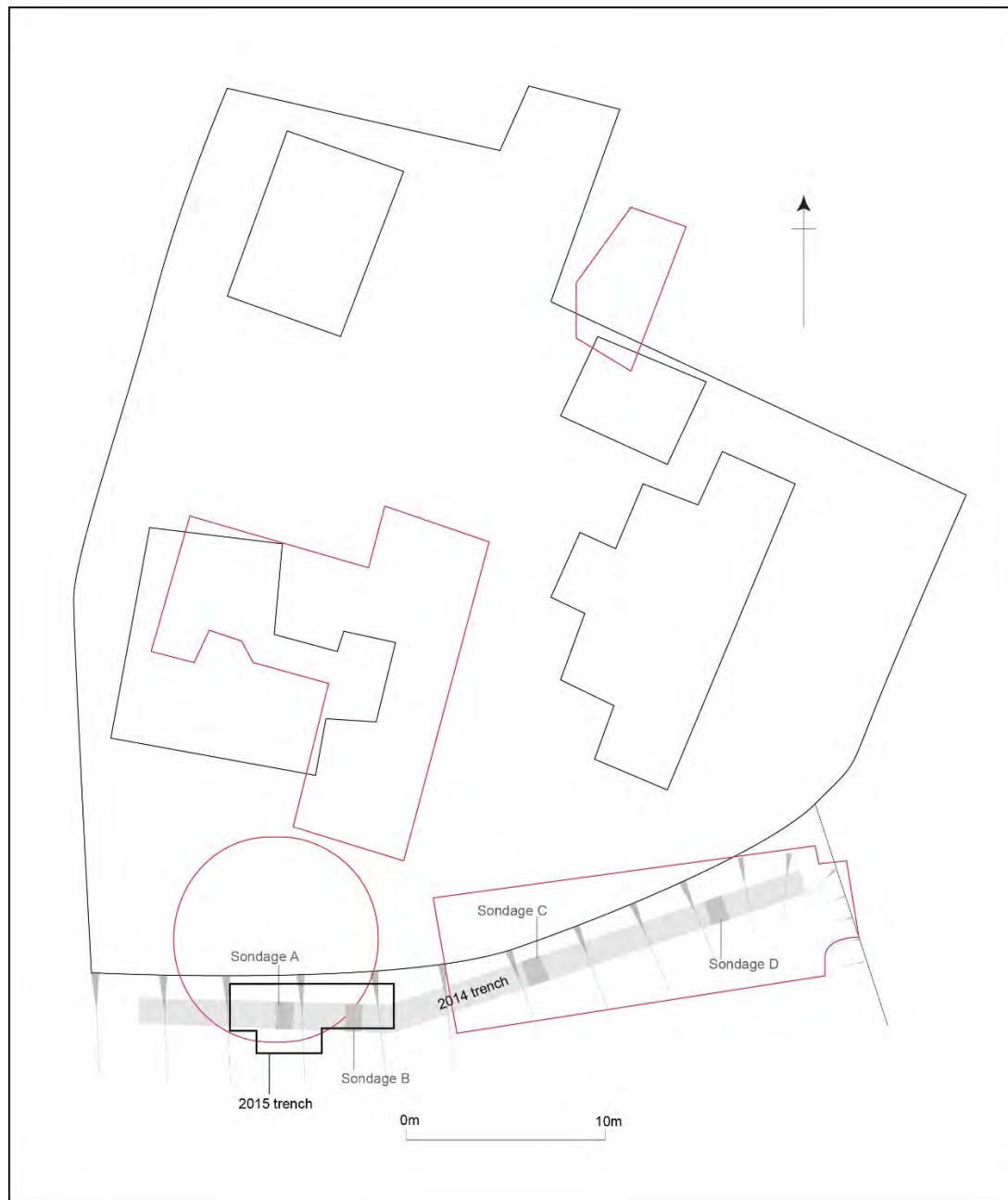


Fig. 2: Location plan showing the 2014 and 2015 excavation trenches in relation to the former pottery buildings which are shown in red. Existing buildings are shown in black.

4 The 2015 Investigations

- 4.1. The results of the 2015 excavation are detailed in this section, while the outreach activities are described in Section 5.
- 4.2. The main trench was positioned over the western end of the 2014 trench (see Fig.2 above), in an attempt to re-examine the area located closest to the site of the former pottery kiln. The 2014 excavation had uncovered spreads of material at this location that were considered likely to have accumulated from the kiln, including dumps of coal, pottery waste and fired clay.
- 4.3. The trench measured 7.08m east-west and 1.86m north-south (though this was extended to 2.96m over the area of a large pit (21) that was exposed during the excavation. The trench was initially excavated down to the levels reached by the 2014 excavation, re-exposing an area that included the linear gully (3), Sondage A and Sondage B.



Fig. 3: The 2015 trench after excavation - CPAT 4042-0022

- 4.4. The 2014 backfill of the linear gully (3) was removed, but no further exploration of this feature was undertaken. The deposits exposed in Sondage A were revisited, the exploration of which revealed that deposits 17 and 18 identified in 2014 were in fact the fill of a large, oval pit (21) measuring 2.2m long by 1.5m wide. A small section aligned north-south and measuring 0.42m wide was excavated across the eastern side of the pit to determine both its depth and form. The pit had been cut through both the natural clay (9) and subsoil (6) and had vertical sides, with the hint of a more rounded profile towards the base. Overall, the pit measured 1.75m deep and was filled by deposit 17, a mixture of slightly gritty grey to yellowish grey clay silt mixed with large quantities of pottery and kiln waste including bricks, fragments of kiln

shelf, saggars, waste pottery and slag. Towards the base of the pit deposit 17 became noticeably siltier.



Fig. 4: Showing section through pit 21 – CPAT 4042-0020

- 4.5. In the area of Sondage B, a section was aligned east-west across deposit (8), a spread of orange, fired clay material that had been exposed in plan in 2014. The southern half of this material was removed by hand, revealing an overall depth of 0.15m, seemingly the upper fill of a possible linear feature or pit (22) which had been cut through the natural clay (9) and natural sub-soil (6). Feature 22 measured around 1.80m east-west and extended beyond the limit of the trench to the north and south. The primary fill (23) was a greyish-brown silt measuring 0.23m thick and containing fragments of waste pottery.



Fig. 5: Section through feature 22 - CPAT image 4042-0013

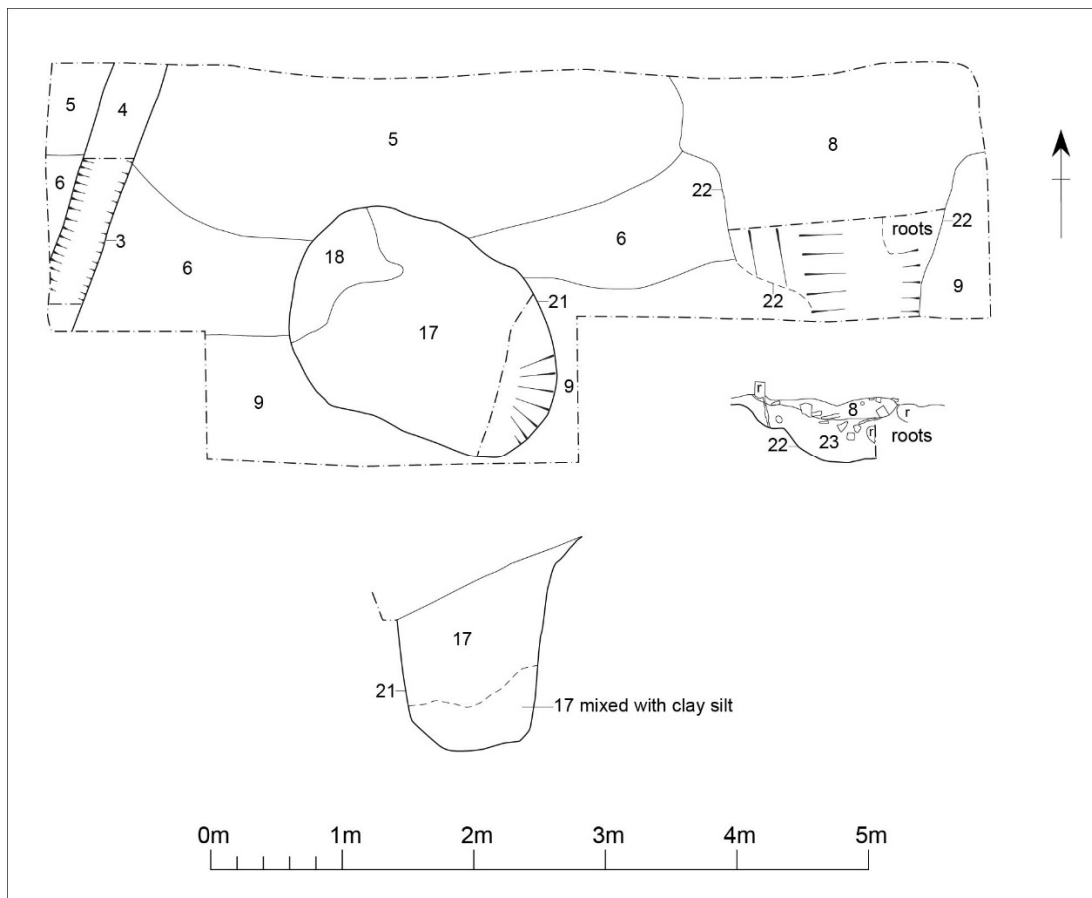


Fig. 6: Plan and sections of the 2015 excavation trench.

- 4.6. As in 2014, large quantities of pottery and associated material were recovered from the two relatively modern soils which covered the deposits described above, the surface soil (1) and beneath this, a dark grey-brown crumbly silt (2).
- 4.7. Although this second phase of excavation was not successful in discovering structural remains of the pottery buildings, it has been possible to re-examine deposits that were exposed during the 2014 excavations and to define specific features relating to the pottery. Two possible pits were identified, the larger of these (pit 21) representing a possible blunging pit that had subsequently been backfilled with a large quantity of pottery waste. Blunging pits were used to process raw clay, reducing it to a liquid slip by the addition of water. This mixture was agitated and then run through a sieve to remove any roots or stones before being fed via a channel or 'goyt' into large, shallow 'clay pans' where it was allowed to stand, possibly over winter, before it could be used from throwing.

5 The Pottery

- 5.1. Many of the finds from the excavations have come from secondary, disturbed, contexts, but this does not detract from their value in revealing the chronology of Price's Pottery. The landscaping of the school playing fields in the 1970s is known to have removed a dump of ceramic waste from the pottery and it is likely that much of the material recovered had its origin there. Recent work by CPAT in 2014 in the adjacent field to the east of the Elfed playing fields also revealed a quantity of ceramics likely to be products of Price's Pottery, including a partially complete bowl with slip-trailed decoration.
- 5.2. Owing to the volume of pottery and kiln furniture that has been recovered during both the 2014 and 2015 excavations, processing of the finds is still ongoing. Initial analysis of the pottery recovered in 2014 by Dr Peter Davey and Christine Longworth revealed that the majority of the Price's Pottery wares appeared to be fine table wares, including mottled ware, press-moulded and slip-trailed slipware and dark wares with very dark brown, almost black glaze. All of these varieties are types of hollow ware and included dishes, bowls, tankards, storage vessels, ceramic bottles, posset pots and black-glazed jars and jugs.



Fig. 7: Examples of some pottery vessels recovered during the 2015 excavation. From left to right; mottled ware tankard, slip-trailed posset pot and a black-glazed jug.

6 Community Engagement

- 6.1. Following the success of the 2014 excavation (Hankinson and Culshaw 2014), Price's Pottery has proved to be a significant and effective source of education and engagement activities. During the time CPAT staff spent at Price's Pottery, over 440 people joined in with activities and events that were offered to facilitate local participation; these included fieldwork, educational workshops, site visits and talks. Activities were very similar to those developed the previous year, but with a focus on processing finds on site to accelerate the post-excavation process. A breakdown of the numbers of people involved can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Breakdown of participants

Staff of CPAT	3
Volunteers	4
Work Placement Students	2
Teachers and school staff	12
High School students	209
Primary School students	197
Members of local societies (CRAG, Buckley Society, Flintshire Archaeology Group)	16

- 6.2. It was agreed that the community excavation and educational activities should maintain the same objectives of enhancing the understanding of the local pottery industry while providing an opportunity for local people to experience and obtain training in archaeological techniques. The archaeological and educational activities were delivered thanks to Cadw's resourcing coupled with educational equipment and material produced by the Trust.
- 6.3. Over 200 Elfed High School students from new classes were given the opportunity to be involved in excavation and post-excavation activities. A great emphasis was given to the analysis of historic maps to facilitate the understanding of the development of the town by identifying changes that had taken place, in field boundaries and alignments, road and path patterns, and buildings. Map regression is an important step in any research project and can be used as starting point from which, progressively, earlier landscapes are deduced. This proved to be a very useful activity with students elaborating theories and drawing conclusions independently by analysing maps. It also stimulated students, thinking about future changes that might affect the area, discussing community needs and priorities.
- 6.4. Finds recovered from site were washed and sorted in the school laboratory (Fig. 8). Where sherds from the same pot were recovered, trainees tried to reconstruct them.

This was greatly beneficial because it allowed participants to gain a better understanding of the pottery vessels and the period of pottery production. Furthermore, it allowed the organisation of an informal “show-and-tell” exhibition of cleaned finds for school students, staff and visitors. These activities were detailed by students and staff of CPAT during an interview by BBC Radio Wales who were preparing a programme on scientific techniques applied in archaeological research (Fig. 9).



Fig. 8: Teachers and students working together, analysing and sorting potsherds. CPAT photo 4065-0023.



Fig. 9: BBC Wales interviewing students busy washing artefacts from the excavation 2015. CPAT photo 4065-0015.

- 6.5. During the time spent at Price's Pottery, students from the University of Manchester and Cardiff, and a small number of volunteers from local groups assisted with the excavation and site recording under the supervision of CPAT archaeologists. Members of the Buckley Society and CRAG contributed to the project by sharing their memories and skills.



Fig. 10: Volunteers excavating the eastern trench of the 2014 excavation (left) and an undergraduate from the University of Manchester washing finds (right). CPAT photo 4065-0015 and 4065-0008.



Fig. 11: Volunteers and residents visiting the laboratory where pots were washed and displayed. CPAT photo 4065-0028.

- 6.6. The project has had a significant impact on the community as a whole allowing them to learn about Price's Pottery and appreciate its connection to the lost ceramic industry of Buckley.

- 6.7. The project has also created a platform for future opportunities within the community. Subsequently, a series of talks have been delivered to the Buckley Society and the Flintshire U3A and information about the project has been exhibited at local fairs. In collaboration with Flintshire County Council a temporary exhibition of the results from the two seasons of excavation will be displayed at the Buckley Museum in November 2015 and a workshop will be delivered by the CPAT community archaeologist to a local youth group. Furthermore, Elfed High School students are currently working with a local artist to produce a mosaic inspired by Price's Pottery using some of the pottery recovered during the excavations. This will be displayed at the local community centre in Buckley.
- 6.8. The students of Elfed High School were so inspired by the project that they entered the 2014 Welsh Heritage School Initiative competition by preparing a report and presentation about Price's Pottery. In 2015, they were examined by a panel of professionals who visited the school and the site. Finally, in July they were awarded a prize of £500 at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff for their involvement with the excavations at Price's Pottery (Fig. 12 below).



Fig. 12: Students of Elfed High School are awarded their prize by the panel of the Welsh Heritage School Initiative in July 2015. Photo courtesy of Angharad Williams.

- 6.9. Positive comments received from both adults and students involved in the project was overwhelming. A sample of these are recorded below.



Fig. 13: Extracts from the poster produced by the students on display in Elfed High School.

"I really enjoyed working with you (CPAT) and I would really like to be involved more in the future." (Shaun, Y9)

"My son enjoyed learning about the past of Buckley, he talks about it (experience) all the time." (Parent of Y9 pupil)

"One of my grandsons thoroughly enjoyed the day he spent with you at the dig and the memory will remain with him for the rest of his life. Thanks again for everything you are doing to raise the profile of Buckley." (Paul Davies, Buckley Society).

7 Conclusions

- 7.1. The project has successfully included, both directly and indirectly, a large number of the local residents in work which has allowed them to gain an appreciation of the past history of their local area. The feedback from those directly involved has been overwhelmingly positive.
- 7.2. Useful information has been gathered regarding the products of the pottery and its period of operation. Preliminary findings suggest that production started in at least the early part of the 18th century, perhaps 50 years earlier than had been previously appreciated, and this may be further refined once a detailed examination of the ceramics has been completed by specialists.
- 7.3. Post-excavation finds processing is still underway at this stage and it is proposed that full quantification, analysis and publication of the pottery will be undertaken in 2016-17. The involvement of pottery specialists Dr Peter Davey and Christine Longworth

has been invaluable to the project to date and their continued input it is anticipated in the final phase of the project.

- 7.4. A type series for the different forms of pottery found at Price's Pottery will also be generated as part of a future programme of work.

8 References

Published sources

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Cartographic sources

- 1757 Lordship of Ewloe map. Flintshire Record Office D/GW/651
- 1757 Lordship of Ewloe schedule (to FRO D/GW/651). Flintshire Record Office D/GW/652
- 1780 (circa) Ewloe Estate maps. Flintshire Record Office D/GW/671 and 674
- 1780 (circa) Ewloe Estate maps schedule. Flintshire Record Office MF3
- 1884 Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:2500 map, Flintshire 14.5
- 1899 Ordnance Survey 2nd edition 1:2500 map, Flintshire 14.5
- 1912 Ordnance Survey 3rd edition 1:2500 map, Flintshire 14.5

9 Archive deposition Statement

- 9.1. The project archive has been prepared according to the CPAT Archive Policy and in line with the CIfA *Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives guidance* (2014). The archive will be deposited with the regional Historic Environment Record, maintained by CPAT in Welshpool, while artefacts are to be deposited with the Buckley Museum, Library and Gallery. A summary of the archive is provided in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1: Site Archive

62 digital photographs, CPAT Film No 3853 (2014)
 312 digital photographs, CPAT Film No 3918 (2014)
 22 digital photographs, CPAT Film No 4042 (2015)
 32 digital photographs, CPAT Film No 4065 (2015)
 Photographic catalogue
 23 context description forms
 2 A1 site drawings (2014), 1 A3 site drawing (2014) 4 A2 site drawings (2015)
 Context register
 Drawings register
 Correspondence

Digital data

Location plan of excavation - elfed.dxf.

Context	Type	Comment
1	Layer of soil	Topsoil
2	Layer of soil	Post-dates 1970s landscaping
3	Gully	Drainage channel ?
4	Layer of fill	Fill of gully 3
5	Layer of coal	Contemporary with the pottery ?
6	Layer of soil	Contemporary with the pottery ?
7	Layer of coal	Contemporary with the pottery ?
8	Layer of soil and stone	Kiln debris ?
9	Natural subsoil	
10	Layer of soil	Disturbed, contemporary with 1970s landscaping
11	Layer of soil	Clay, includes possible kiln debris
12	Layer of soil	Lump of clay - intended for pottery manufacture but unused ?
13	Layer of soil	Earliest artificial deposit in the excavation
14	Layer of soil and stone	Kiln debris ?
15	Layer of coal	Contemporary with the pottery ?
16	Layer of soil	Contemporary with the pottery ?
17	Layer of soil	Post-dates 1970s landscaping
18	Layer of soil and stone	Kiln debris ?
19	Natural subsoil	
20	Layer of soil	Ceramic rich layer above 7
21	Pit	Backfilled blunging pit/clay extraction pit ?
22	Pit/Linear	Pit or linear feature
23	Layer of soil	Lower fil of Pit 22, below 8

Drawing Register

No	Scale	Comment	Year
1	1:20	A1: Trench plan and section	2014
2	1:20	A1: Ground profiles	2014
3	1:20	A3: Overlay for sondages (plan)	2014
4	1:20	A2: Trench plan pre-excavation	2015
5	1:20	A2: Trench plan post-excavation	2015
6	1:20	A2: Section (pit 22)	2015
7	1:20	A2: Section (pit 21)	2015