

CLARE CASTLE EXCAVATIONS, 1955

By GROUP CAPTAIN G. M. KNOCKER

Consequent upon the decision of the Clare Rural District Council to run a sewer trench across the northern bailey of Clare Castle, part of a general sewerage scheme covering the whole town, the writer was instructed to keep a watch over the excavations and report any interesting discoveries to the Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Ministry of Works. This duty was carried out at intervals between 5 June and 4 August, 1955.¹

HISTORY²

Of the Castle nothing now remains except the motte, the northern bank of the inner bailey, with fragments of its curtain wall and the northern and eastern banks of the northern bailey. The main castle buildings have disappeared, most of the inner bailey being occupied by the railway station. The present layout is shown in Fig. 17, forming part of the 25-inch map O.S. Suffolk Sheet LXXI.7 and Essex Sheet V.7.

Little is known, says Mrs. Ward, of Clare before the Norman Conquest. There is evidence of a Roman Camp near the Danepits and it is thought that the northern bailey was part of an Anglo-Saxon fortification at the time of the Conquest when Earl Aluric held the town.³ (The present very limited excavations, however, did little to justify this belief, no Saxon pottery being found within the northern bailey, with the possible exception of Fig. 20.1).

¹ The thanks of the writer are due to Mr. G. C. Bickerton, Resident Engineer, Clare R.D.C., Messrs. A. Patterson and M. W. Dyer of Messrs. W. & C. French, Ltd., the Contractors undertaking the work and to various gangers and labourers employed by this firm for much cordial co-operation and assistance. Thanks are also due to Mr. J. Allpress, late Town Clerk, Clare, for his co-operation in this excavation.

² The following notes on the history of Clare Castle have been extracted from *A Short History of Clare*, by Gladys A. Thornton, B.A., PH.D., F.R.HIST.S., (Mrs. J. G. S. Ward), (Benham & Co., Colchester, 1946), which is a summary of her *History of Clare* (Heffer, 1930). A sketch map of Clare in the 14th century, reproduced from the *Short History*, is shown at Fig. 18, by kind permission of Messrs. W. Heffer & Sons Ltd., in whose *History of Clare* it first appeared, and Messrs. Benham & Co.

In *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, vol. 1, pp. 61 ff, will be found an account by Samuel Tymms, F.S.A., read to the Society in 1848, of the castle and its history, and illustrated with plans and sketches, done in 1785. The main block plan, facing page 61, is a useful complement to Mrs. Ward's sketch map at Fig. 18. It shows clearly the southern bailey, now quite destroyed.

³ But on this see the comments of J. H. Round, 'The Family of Clare', *Arch. Journal*, LVI (1899), 229-30.

PLATE XX



The outer bailey, Clare Castle, looking from the motte

PLATE XXI



Entrance to outer bailey, Clare Castle, looking towards the motte

After the Conquest the King held Clare, by whom it was given to Richard of Bienfaite and the town became the centre of a great aggregate of Manors known as the Honour of Clare. Under the Norman lords the Castle developed into a strong fortification. Gilbert of Clare issued a deed there as early as 1090 A.D. Of the two baileys, the northern one had earth ramparts but no wall. South of this was a motte, one hundred feet high, surmounted by a strong stone keep. A stone wall descended the motte and was continued along the top of the earth ramparts which enclosed the inner, southern bailey; a moat surrounded the motte and a deep fosse separated the two baileys. Plate XX shows the outer, or northern bailey, seen from the motte. Plate XXI shows the gap in the north-east corner of the bailey.

The Castle was still used as a place of residence in the fifteenth century, at the end of which period it became a Crown possession and it is likely that it soon fell into ruin, its timber and stones being used for local buildings, road repairs and the like.

THE 1955 EXCAVATIONS

The excavations under review consisted of two main sections:

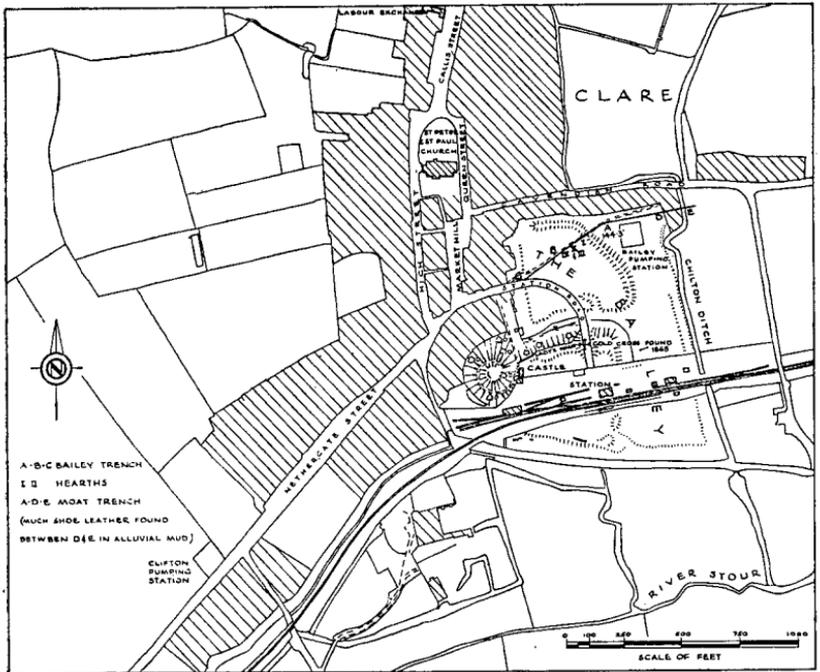
1. A trench from a point east of the northern bailey bank across the northern bailey (Fig. 17 A-B-C).
2. A trench running east across the area bounded on the west by the northern bailey bank and on the east by the Chilton Ditch (Fig. 17 A-D-E).

Section 1

This section was dug by a mechanical bucket excavator, which made it impossible to assign levels to the pottery and objects which poured with the soil on to the spoil heaps beside the trench. A section was however drawn of the 400 foot long trench. This is shewn in part at Fig. 19.

The first 60 feet revealed nothing of interest. Between 30 and 90 feet west of Point A the trench passed through a gap in the bailey bank. In the section between 70 and 90 feet west, the upper 4 feet consisted of clayey loam with much chalk and flint, representing either the footings of the bailey bank or foundations for a hard surface at a possible medieval entrance to the bailey at this point. It will be observed that Mrs. Ward does not indicate an entrance here in her sketch map at Fig. 18, but this hard filling makes it appear that one existed.

At 105 feet west a small hearth appeared at a depth of 18 inches (Hearth I). Between 162 and 168 feet west a large hearth, consisting of 1 foot of burnt clay upon a layer of burnt black soil and



(Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey Map with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office. Crown Copyright reserved)

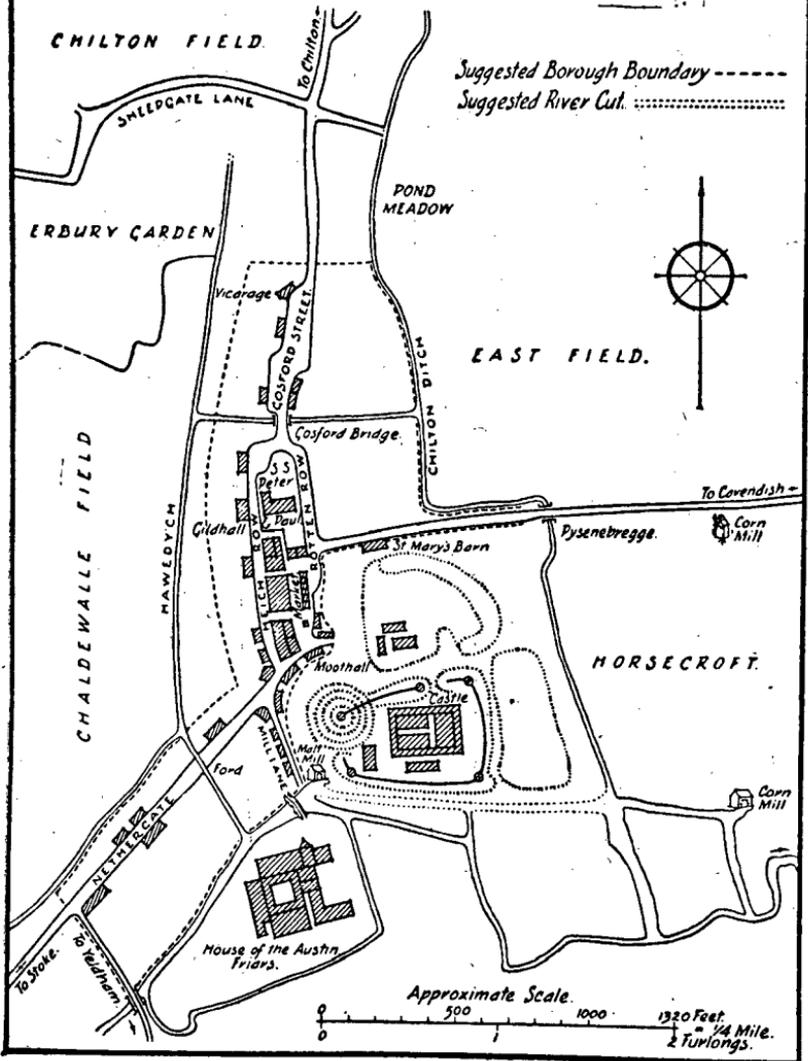
FIG. 17.—Map of Clare, present day

ash, was observed at a depth of 18 inches (Hearth II). Another smaller hearth (Hearth III) made up of gray ash below a layer of chalk, appeared at the same depth 10 feet further west. Associated with these two hearths were a number of sherds of 12th/13th century cooking-pots (Fig. 20. 7 and 20). At 185 feet west there appeared to have been a small pit, whilst between 210 and 220 feet west was another considerable hearth (Hearth IV), consisting of a basin of burnt mortar set in burnt sand, starting at a depth of 2 feet. Considerable quantities of pottery were found associated with this hearth, again mainly 12th/13th century cooking-pots (Fig. 20. 3-6, 8, 10-17).

Further west the stratification shewed no features of interest, but a few rims of a similar nature were found scattered along the section (Fig. 20. 1, 9, 18-19). A possible Middle Saxon rim is shewn at Fig. 20. 1.

The only small finds of interest were an iron knife blade with a tang found at 2 feet near the entrance to the bailey, another knife at 190 west, (Fig. 21. 1 and 2) and a Charles I farthing found at

SKETCH MAP OF CLARE IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.



(Reproduced, by permission, from History of Clare)

FIG. 18.—Map of Clare in the 14th century

CLARE CASTLE TRENCH ACROSS NORTHERN BAILEY

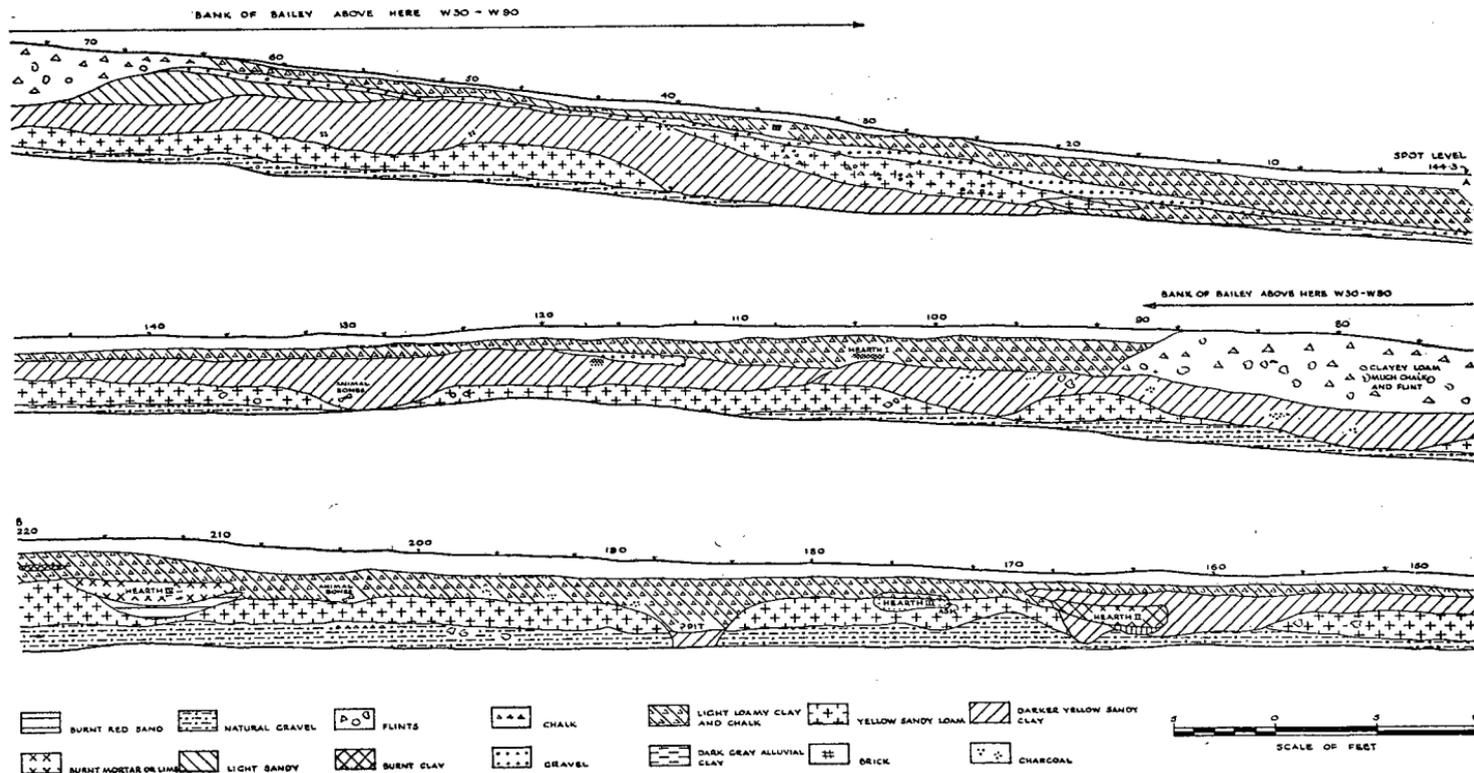


FIG. 19.—Section of trench through outer (northern) bailey.

4 feet in disturbed gravel near the extreme western end of the trench.

Interpretation of the section of this trench makes it appear that the ground level in the 12th/13th century was about 18 inches to 2 feet below modern ground level and that the hearths represented the sites of small hutments or barracks for the occupants of the Castle at that period.

Section 2

East of the northern bailey bank and between it and the Chilton Ditch, which is banked up along its eastern edge, is a broad strip of land curving round towards the inner bailey. A large excavation for the Bailey Pumping Stations produced nothing of interest except some animal bones. A trench dug with a mechanical grab between points A and D (Fig. 17) shewed that a layer of black alluvial mud lay at a depth of about 6 feet below the present ground level, indicating that this area east of the northern bailey was probably marshy in early times and perhaps was once flooded, forming a moat outside the northern bailey. Below the mud was natural gravel.

Nothing of interest was found in the section A-D except animal bones and a pair of iron candle-snuffers.

The section D-E was hand-dug but a section could not be drawn as steel revetting plates had to be inserted on each side of the trench as it was dug. This section however produced a great quantity of shoe leather, soles and uppers, from the alluvial mud. With the exception of a 19th century stray, they were all datable to the period 1350-1450; all were of cow hide. A report has kindly been prepared by Mr. J. H. Thornton, Head of the Department of Boot and Shoe Manufacture, Northampton College of Technology to whom the writer's grateful thanks are due. The report is at Appendix A and selection of the shoes at Figs. 22 and 23. The area covered by Section D-E seems to have been used as a rubbish dump in the 14th-15th centuries for the shoes were all well worn.

A possible Late Saxon rim came from below the mud (Fig. 20. 2) and a probable 13th century, but perhaps earlier, rim came from the mud (Fig. 20. 21).

Below the mud were also found a small well-made bone peg or stylus (Fig. 21. 5) and a horse shoe (Fig. 21. 4). Chilton Ditch produced various sherds of late glass and pottery of no special interest and a small glass bead (Fig. 21. 6), which could be of any date. A number of animal bones came from Section D-E, a report on which, kindly prepared by Miss Judith King of the British Museum, National History, South Kensington, is attached as Appendix B.

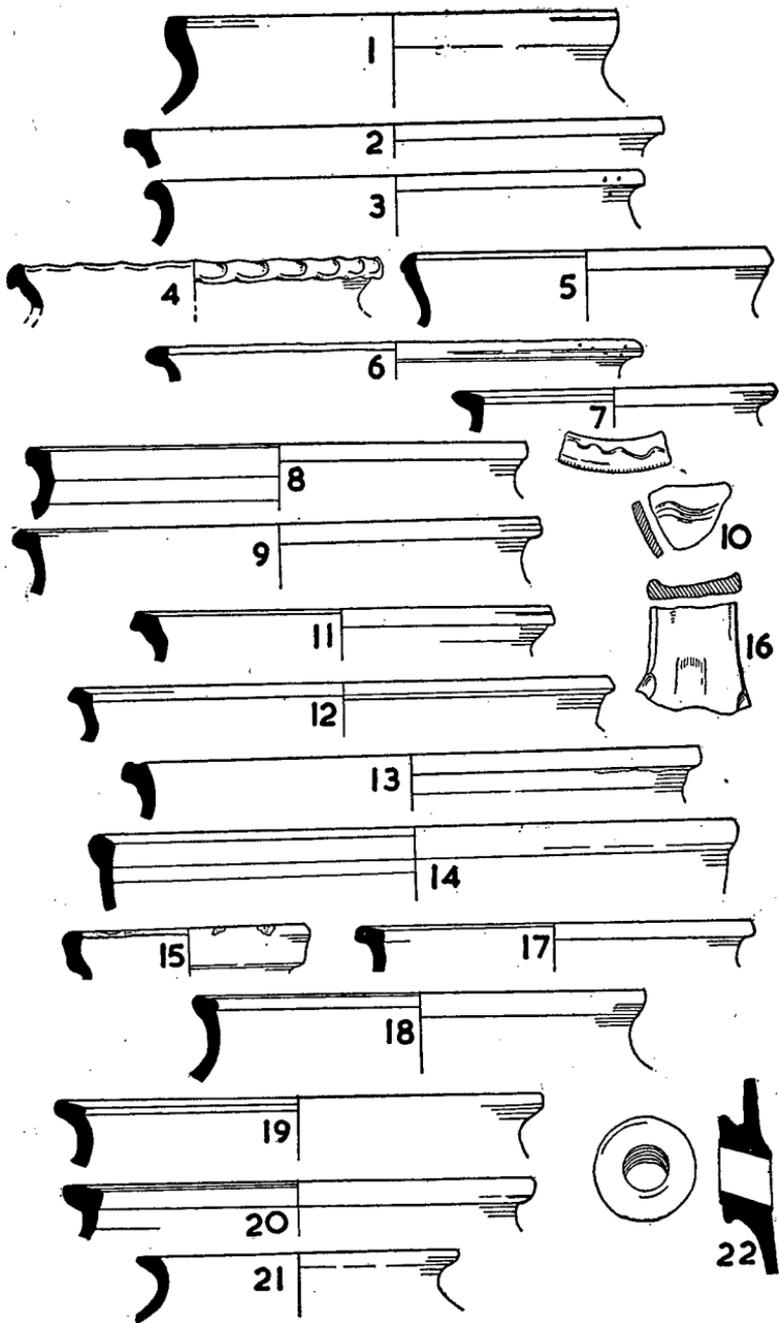


FIG. 20.—Clare Castle, pottery. 1. Perhaps Middle Saxon; 2. Perhaps Late Saxon; 3-4. 1st half 12th C.; 5. During 12th C.; 6. 13th C. or earlier; 7-10. 1st half 13th C.; 11-16. During 13th C.; 17-20. 2nd half 13th C.; 21. Probably 13th C. but perhaps earlier; 22. 15th C. (All $\frac{1}{4}$).

From the excavation for the Labour Exchange Site at the corner of Callis Street and Common Street, north of Clare Parish Church, came a stone spindle whorl with an unusually large spindle hole (Fig. 21. 7).

POTTERY (Fig. 20)

As already noted the method by which the pottery was uncovered made any close stratification impossible. The pottery has therefore been arranged in approximate typologically dated groups. Some of it is similar to that found at Bungay Castle, in the same county, as illustrated in Vol. 22 of these *Proceedings*. Where Clare sherds are compared with the Bungay sherds they have been annotated *B.C.* followed by the relevant number in the figure on page 335 of that volume. The figure in brackets after each sherd listed below is the find reference number marked on the sherd. The areas to which these numbers refer are as follows:

- (5) Around Hearths II and III, (6) Around Hearth IV,
(7) In bailey west of Point B, (13) Trench D-E.

Perhaps Middle Saxon

1. Cooking-pot; brownish-buff, harsh, gritty ware; upright rim, flattened on top and thickened above neck. (7)

Perhaps Late Saxon

2. Bowl; iron-gray Thetford ware; found at a depth of 7 feet in gravel, below alluvial mud. (13)

1st half of 12th century

3. Cooking-pot; dark, reddish-brown, harsh, gritty ware; plain rolled rim. (6)
4. Cooking-pot; brick-red, gritty ware; rim splayed and thumb-pressed. (6)

During 12th century

5. Cooking-pot; brown, gritty ware; little eversion, internal beading; sooted. (6)

13th century or earlier

6. Bowl; dark gray, coarse, pitted ware, charged with flints. (6)

1st half of 13th century

7. Cooking-pot; reddish-brown, gritty ware; slight internal beading on the broad oval-sectioned rim, which carries an irregular, incised wavy scrawl. (5)
8. Cooking-pot; harsh, reddish-brown, gritty ware, charged with small flints; upstanding rim with a slight external beading and a double, dished facet on the inside; sooted. (6)

9. Cooking-pot; buff-gray with small flints. (7) cf. *B.C.* 2 and 3.
10. Body sherd; dark brown, gritty ware with triple, wavy comb scrawl. (6)

During 13th century

11. Cooking-pot; dark brown, harsh, gritty ware. (6)
12. Cooking-pot; brown, with flint particles. (6) cf. *B.C.* 8.
13. Cooking-pot; buff-gray, gritty ware with flint flecks. (6)
14. Wide-mouthed bowl; brick-red, gritty ware. (6)
15. Jug; coarse, brown ware with uneven patches of fair quality green glaze applied to the outside. (6)
16. Strap-handle; buff, gritty ware. (6)

2nd half of 13th century

17. Cooking-pot; buff-brown, gritty ware; upstanding neck with internally beaded rim. (6) cf. *B.C.* 8.
18. Cooking-pot; buff-gray, harsh gritty ware; internal beading on rim. (7)
19. Cooking-pot; dark brown, harsh, gritty ware with small flints; internal beading on rim. (7) cf. *B.C.* 8.
20. Cooking-pot; buff-brown, gritty ware; broad, oval section rim. (5)

Probably 13th century, but perhaps earlier

21. Cooking-pot; dark brown, close textured ware; rolled rim with flattened top. (13)

15th century

22. Bung-hole in brick red, smooth, sandy ware; from alluvial mud associated with shoes in Fig. 22. (8)

SMALL FINDS (Fig. 21)

(The numbers in brackets are the find reference numbers)

1. Tanged, iron knife; in bank filling at 2 feet at north entrance to bailey. (1)
2. Tanged, iron, double-shouldered knife; from spoil heap at W.190, perhaps from top of pit. This knife could be Late Saxon. (8)
3. Iron staple; at entrance to bailey at W.80. (11)
4. Iron horse-shoe with recessed nail holes, calkin and slightly wavy edge; from gravel at depth of 7 feet, below mud, east of the pumping station in trench D-E. (12)

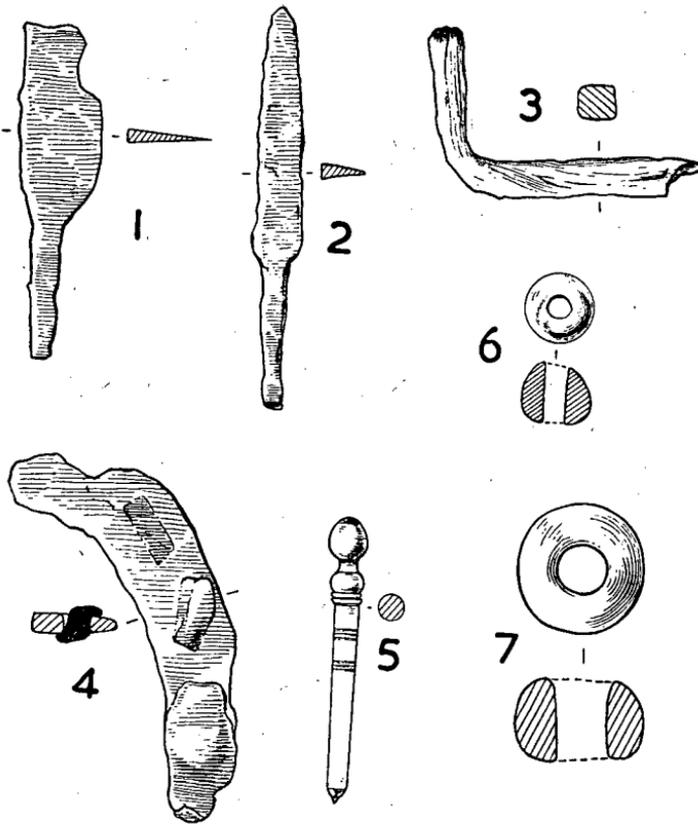


FIG. 21.—Clare Castle, small finds. 1-2. Iron knives; 3. Iron staple; 4. Iron horseshoe; 5. Bone pin; 6. Blue glass bead; 7. Stone spindle whorl. (6, $\frac{1}{2}$; rest, $\frac{1}{2}$).

5. Bone pins with pine-apple shaped head, grooved collar and two bands of triple grooves on shaft; from gravel at depth of 7 feet 6 inches, below mud, in trench D-E. (9) Perhaps a stylus.
6. Bead in deep blue glass from bed of Chilton Ditch. (13)
7. Stone spindle whorl; unstratified from site of the Labour Exchange at corner of Callis Street and Common Street. (2)

Not illustrated

Charles I farthing in nat. gravel 10 feet east of west end of trench across bailey. (3)

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The pottery and other finds have been deposited with the Clerk to the Clare Parish Council, pending a decision as to their final disposal.

APPENDIX A

REPORT ON THE LEATHER SHOE PARTS AND OTHER
LEATHER FRAGMENTS FOUND AT CLARE CASTLE

By J. H. THORNTON, M.A., F.B.S.I.

(Figs. 22 and 23)

Out of some 36 leather specimens examined, 13 were turn-shoe soles of about 1350-1450, either complete or fragmentary, with the usual characteristics:

- (a) Edge-flesh marginal channel of stitching holes, 4 or 5 per inch.
- (b) Considerable wear at inside tread and outside seat.
- (c) Signs of repairs.
- (d) Markedly left or right.

They resemble closely those found at the Tower of London 1958/59.

One (13) (Fig. 23. 5) has the exaggerated pointed toe which was controlled by sumptuary law in 1463 and disappeared by about 1480-90.

Specimens of uppers were as usual more fragmentary. A complete vamp (3) (Fig. 22. 2B) and quarters (6) (Fig. 22. 2C) possibly belong to sole (2) (Fig. 6. 2A); vamp and quarters would be joined together with a butt seam either side.

One specimen (17c), sole, insole, peaked embroidered cap and fragment of quarter, all riveted together with brass nails, has no chronological connection with the other specimens. Its date is about 1850-60. 17b may also belong to the same period.

In addition to the shoe fragments there are two specimens (17a) (Fig. 23. 6) which appear to be the two halves of a powder horn.