
12 The Molluscs by John A Lawson

The excavation produced a small shell assemblage of 125 complete shells, comprising 11 marine mollusc species, of which 80.8% were from recognized edible species (Table 13).

The assemblage of shells recovered from St Giles' follows the general distribution patterns already established from previous excavated sites from Edinburgh (Heppel 1980; Heppel 1985) and eastern Scotland. The recovered species are all currently common within the Firth of Forth (Mckay & Smith 1979), with the notable exception of *Ostrea edulis* (oyster). This species was, however, common in the Forth Estuary in the past and was commercially exploited throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods until overfishing of the beds killed off the fishery in the early 19th century. Archaeological evidence for the medieval commercial processing of oysters was recovered from excavations in Leith at both Burgess Street (Collard & Reed 1994) and Ronaldson's Wharf (Reed & Lawson 1997).

Although this small sample is indicative of domestic waste, the majority of the shells at St Giles' were found in redeposited contexts often associated with wall construction. Shells from both edible and non-edible species alike were also found with adhering lime-mortar, indicating their use predominantly as wall pinnings.

Table 13 Mollusc species and abundance

Species	Total shell count per species
<i>Cerastoderma edula</i> (cockle)	27
<i>Ostrea edulis</i> (oyster)	24
<i>Buccinus undatum</i> (common whelk)	18
<i>Mytilus edulis</i> (mussel)	17
<i>Littorina littorea</i> (edible periwinkle)	15
<i>Patella vulgata</i> (limpet)	12
<i>Nucella lapinus</i> (dog whelk)	3
<i>Dosinus lupinus</i>	3
<i>Ensis siliqua</i> (razor shell)	2
<i>Ensis ensis</i>	2
<i>Venerupis senegalensis</i> (carpet shell)	2