

Gone to pot?

Derek Hall

Pottery is the most common find from archaeological excavations in Scotland's medieval burghs, it does not decay and always survives when organic material does not. Since the first urban excavations of the mid 1970's we now have a vast assemblage of material, this paper aims to consider what information we can gain from this material and what our future research aims should be. It is appropriate to be giving this paper in Perth as it was the High Street excavations of the mid to late 1970's that first indicated the vast range of pottery that was present from deposits in the burgh. Something in excess of 42,000 sherds were recovered from the High Street excavation alone, I know because I have counted them out of their bags and back again!

It was clear from the High Street excavations that pottery from many areas of England and Continental Europe was present from the medieval town. I would like to begin by giving a rough guide to these imports before concentrating on what we can now say about the Scottish medieval pottery industry.

Shelly wares

If we examine the pottery from the earliest phases of occupation in Perth, dating to the early 12th century or before, it is quite striking that virtually all the material is imported. The most intriguing material present is the sizeable group of shelly wares from the 75 High Street excavation. Jars used for cooking are the most common vessel form represented although there is also a cauldron leg which is only paralleled by a find from the Billingsgate excavations in London. These shelly wares have been identified as being from South Eastern England and have also been recovered from excavations in Norway (Bryggen Papers). There is an ongoing discussion regarding the dating of this pottery as specialists from London have argued that the material from 75 High Street can date no later than 1150 but both myself and George Haggarty feel that it must be earlier. The biggest concentration of shelly ware from 75 High Street comes from Phase 1 and there must be a strong chance that these levels predate the founding of the burgh and must predate 1150. It is worth remembering that a more recent excavation directly across the High Street at 80-86, now Virgin records, located a wattle lined ditch possibly forming a boundary around an early version of St John's church that was carbon dated to 990+/- 50 AD (Moloney and Coleman 1997, 707-782). This early date surely indicates that there is some sort of occupation in Perth in the 10th or 11th centuries. None of this fabric has been recovered from excavations in Leith, another early trading port. A bid has been submitted to Historic Scotland to carbon date the carbonised deposits on some of these vessels so in the near future we may finally have a date bracket to consider.

Greywares

Another sizeable group of unidentified pottery is also present in early levels from Perth. These greyware fabrics have been found from excavations in Perth at 75 High Street (Hall forthcoming), 103 High Street (Hall 2000) and 110 High Street (Hall 1996). At all three sites they were directly associated with timber buildings on the medieval High Street frontage. It would appear that this fabric is only found in the earliest part of the burgh (eastern end of the High Street) and tends to be present in deposits where the only Scottish fabric present is White Gritty ware (see below). At 110 High Street this fabric accounts for 25% of the whole pottery assemblage (232 sherds out of 913) and at 75 High Street it accounts for 26% of the Phase 1 pottery assemblage (224 out of 851). Recent ICPS analysis by the British Geological Survey

has indicated that some of these fabrics are likely to be East Anglian in origin but there still remains an unidentified group which could be Danish (Hall and Chenery 2002). Further work on this group of fabrics is required.

Early whitewares

Pottery produced in Stamford in England and Andenne in Belgium in the early 12th century looks visually very similar and can often be difficult to correctly identify, both fabrics are also represented in early levels from Perth.

Yorkshire Type wares

By the 13th and 14th centuries the scene is dominated by the very well made and distinctively glazed wares made at various kilns in Yorkshire (McCarthy and Brooks 1988). In the early years of work on Scottish ceramics this fabric was always described as Scarborough ware but in recent years due to the realisation that there were many more kilns producing this fabric it has been decided that it is safer to call this material Yorkshire Type wares. Needless to say we are leaving the definition of the various production centres safely in the hands of our English colleagues! Without a doubt these vessels have an enormous effect on the local Scottish industries when they finally get going as can be seen by the many attempts at copying the vessel form and decoration. Probably the best known vessel type in this fabric is the knight jug, a vessel which has knights on horse back riding around the outside.

French wares

Until very recently it had always been assumed that French imported pottery was very much a West Coast phenomenon due to the route taken by the wine trade however George Haggarty's recent survey of all French material found in Scotland has indicated that the wares of Saintonge, Rouen and elsewhere are actually much more common across the whole country (Haggarty forthcoming). In passing it is worth explaining that George's survey forms part of a new review of pottery imported into Medieval Scotland that is being undertaken by the Scottish group of medieval ceramicists.

Low Countries wares

In the 13th and 14th centuries Redwares and greywares from the Low Countries are common finds in the East coast burghs and probably reflect the presence and influence of Flemings in the Scotland.

Rhenish stonewares

Around about 1350 a entirely new type of pottery begins to appear from Germany called stoneware. This pottery is very highly fired and becomes popular amongst the burgesses of Perth and elsewhere (Gaimster 1997).

Scottish wares

Essentially the Scottish pottery industry was producing variations of two fabrics, redwares and white wares. These two fabrics are being manufactured from different clay sources, alluvial carse river valley clays in the case of the redwares and white firing lacustrine clays in the case of the whitewares. The earliest of the two would appear to be the white gritty industry which we believe was in production from at least the mid 12th century. George Haggarty suggested many years ago that this industry was brought into Scotland by the monastic orders of Northern England and I agree that this would seem to be the most likely reason for its arrival (Haggarty 1984). In recent years we began to identify regional trends in the vessel forms that were being made in this fabric. For example in the Borders we have the very distinctive thin walled straight sided cooking pot, in Fife a more globular vessel often with two handles, the Fifers obviously did not want to burn their fingers! (Hall 1997).

As already mentioned earlier the jugs forms in White gritty ware are influenced by vessels from Yorkshire. Recent chemical sourcing is beginning to suggest that the gritty ware production centres may have been more widespread than previously thought (Will et al forthcoming). Our basic problem is the lack of a decent chronology and to indicate the sort of lengths that pottery specialists often go to I have suggested recently that the highly fired sherds of gritty ware that are often found are an indication that the potters are attempting to copy the Rhenish stonewares. If true this would allow us to date any deposits containing this type of gritty ware to the mid 14th century. This theory remains to be properly tested.

Production centres

To successfully define a chronology for our native fabrics we need to properly excavate and scientifically date some kilns. At this moment in time only four sites have been investigated at Stenhouse and Throsk in Stirlingshire, Colstoun in East Lothian and Rattray in Aberdeenshire. Of these four sites only one, at Colstoun, was a White Gritty ware production centre, Stenhouse and Rattray were producing medieval redware and Throsk post medieval redware

In recent years Historic Scotland have started to provide funds for the analysis and publication of both Stenhouse and Colstoun kilns. This work has just lately been carried out by Derek Hall at SUAT Ltd. The publication of the Throsk production site was undertaken by Caldwell and Dean (1992) and the excavations at Rattray by HK and JC Murray (1993). In this paper it is only possible to summarise what has been done on these sites and highlight the main points of interest.

White Gritty wares

Colstoun, East Lothian

The kilns at Colstoun were first discovered as a result of the digging of grouse shooting butts in 1939. At this time some limited excavation was undertaken by Lady Broun Lindsay and later, in 1971 this was completed by Dr David Clarke for the National Museum of Scotland. In 1969 another kiln was excavated by Ben Edwards again for the National Museum. All the pottery from Clarke's excavations was published together by Cathy Brooks (PSAS 1978-80) but nothing was done with the important information regarding the kilns. Historic Scotland commissioned SUAT to catalogue the pottery from Ben Edward's excavation and pull together all the available evidence for the kilns. As part of this process and following a suggestion by Sarah Jennings and Alan Vince SUAT also re-excavated Ben Edward's Type 3 kiln and obtained an archaeomagnetic date of 1320-1350 AD for the final firing of this kiln. Unfortunately despite two attempts SUAT were unable to rediscover David Clarke's kilns which were both Musty's Type 2 (Musty 1974). Cataloguing the pottery from Edward's kiln shows that 97% of the vessels are glazed jugs; while cooking pots are only represented by 20 sherds. The fill of Clarke's kilns on the other hand produced fragments mainly of cooking pots. Colstoun also produced a sizeable assemblage of kiln furniture. This material is largely represented by very distinctive waisted cylindrical shaped kiln props; there are 51 from Edwards kiln and 170 from Clarkes kilns (Fig. 3), similar material was also recovered from Stenhouse. The information from the three excavated kilns at Colstoun might suggest that different kiln types were producing different vessel types at least, in their final firing (Hall 1999).

Redwares

It would appear that a lot of the Scottish medieval burghs, particularly those in close proximity to a river valley, were using locally produced redwares. The big question is where were the kiln sites? If we look at Perth as an example we have yet to find any evidence for pottery kilns within the burgh limits, indeed the potters were not

members of the Guildry Incorporation. In the late 50's the local redware in Perth was called Kinnoull Ware on the strength of a sizeable assemblage of pottery from a site beside Kinnoull Church on the east side of the River Tay (Stevenson and Henshall 1956-7, 250-252). However having examined this material I can find no kiln waste or kiln furniture. It is worth saying however that the existence of a water source and clay supply does not rule this site completely out of the equation. To the west of Perth we have an area called Claypotts but so far there is no evidence for pottery manufacture in this area either. Interestingly enough until the mid 19th century there was a brick and tile works in the vicinity so maybe this explains the place name. Our first piece of kiln furniture from Perth was discovered recently at the excavations on the site of the new council headquarters. This site lies outside the burgh limits on its north side and would seem to suggest that at least some of the pottery production for Perth is taking place in an extra mural location. Kiln waste from recent excavations to the north of Arbroath abbey may also suggest that are kiln sites in that vicinity. Let us look now at the three identified Scottish redware production centres which are all located in rural areas.

Ratray, Aberdeenshire

The kilns at Ratray were discovered during the excavations of the deserted medieval burgh (Murray 1993). These kilns appear to represent small-scale local pottery production specifically for the burgh. The kilns, essentially Musty's type 2 double flue, also demonstrated the use of kiln props similar to those recovered from Colstoun and Stenhouse. Ratray produced a mixture of vessel types including jugs, jars and bowls. This small-scale production during the 13th or 14th centuries at least, this may be more representative of the general situation in Scotland, rather than larger production sites serving a wider region.

Stenhouse, Falkirk Council

The eleven pottery kilns at Stenhouse, which lies to the North of Falkirk, were discovered as a result of sand quarrying by the Carron Iron Works and the excavation and recording was carried out by the late Doreen Hunter, using local volunteers. Following the excavations, the vast bulk of the pottery assemblage was put in store by Falkirk Museum and, apart from abortive attempts in the 1970s was never written up. Historic Scotland commissioned SUAT to write up both the pottery and the site records, and the completed report has been recently published in *Medieval Archaeology* (Hall 2001, 97-168). Probably of most interest at Stenhouse is the apparent link between the potters and the Knights Hospitallers at Torphichen, which lies some 15km to the south east of the production centre. At least two of the vessels were decorated with Maltese crosses and it was discovered that the knights owned land at Stenhouse in the 16th century. The figure jugs from this site are very distinctive with padded face masks and incised saltire crosses (Fig. 2, 1-10), the final report argues that this style of decoration could be a link with the Knights revival of the crusading movement (MacQuarrie 1985, 114-117). This assemblage would seem to date no earlier than the late 15th/early 16th century based on vessel form. The obvious problem is deciding whether the knights were responsible for the setting up of the industry in the first place or whether they were commissioning the potters to make vessels for the preceptory. One of the kilns produced three complete vessels for which the only parallel is a sugar refining jar that was used in the sugar refining process (Brooks 1983, 1-14). It is tempting to see these vessels as another possible link to the knights of St John at Torphichen who certainly would have had access to sugar cane plantations in the Mediterranean.

Throsk, Stirlingshire

The production centre at Throsk is essentially of post medieval date operating in the

17th and 18th centuries. It is of most interest as it is a rare Scottish example of pottery manufacturing that is actually documented. It is worth stressing at this point that no kilns at Throsk have been excavated (Caldwell and Dean 1992, 1-46).

Future Research

It seems true to say that Scottish medieval pottery studies has now come of age largely due to the support and funding of Historic Scotland and the hard work and imagination of various specialists. We are now in a position to answer specific questions and ask new ones. For example recent excavations in the far north of Scotland at Robert's Haven in Caithness located a sizeable assemblage of organic tempered pottery of local manufacture. Originally thought to be of Viking date when carbon dated this material has actually proved to be medieval (Hall forthcoming). Admittedly all the vessels are specifically for fish oil production so we may not be looking at normal local pottery manufacture but it does pose a question as to what is happening in those areas where a clay source is not so readily available. I firmly believe that the Carse of Gowrie must be a good candidate for the location of pottery production simply due to the existence of a sizeable clay resource in the Errol area (Hall 1998). Recently I have been struck by the fact that all the excavated medieval production centres are in the vicinity of either castles or tower houses possibly suggesting that there might be a baronial or manorial element to the promotion and control of pottery manufacture. Along with water and fuel supply does this give us another clue when we are looking for kiln sites? The suggestion of monastic influence on the early Scottish pottery industry is also something that needs to be explored and tested. Finally the recent introduction of Inductively Coupled Mass Spectroscopy (chemical sourcing) is producing very important and exciting results and gives us another tool in our search for kiln sites (Chenery, Phillips and Haggarty forthcoming). In closing I would like to say that Scottish pottery studies have not gone to pot but are living and breathing and beginning to produce interesting results.

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