Illus 1 Location of named find spots in Tentsmuir. (Copyright Ordnance Survey)
Scottish White Gritty Ware from antiquarian excavations in Tentsmuir Forest, Fife

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Introduction

An assemblage of 5,154 sherds of medieval pottery from Tentsmuir is now held by Fife Council Museums, but appears originally to have been in the possession of St Andrews University Museum. It originates from excavations at various sites in Tentsmuir between 1932 and 1947, all carried out by a group known as the St Andrews Prehistorians. This material came to the author’s attention during the second phase of a Historic Scotland funded project on the sourcing of Scottish White Gritty Ware (Will et al forthcoming). The present project was entirely funded by Historic Scotland.

Background (Illus 1)

According to the minutes of the St Andrews Prehistorians, they undertook numerous visits to Tentsmuir to collect material from the various ‘bunkers’ and ‘mounds’ at locations such as Earlshall, Kinshaldy, Wards Farm and Morton. Many of these features are given names such as ‘Beech Bunker’, ‘Cinder Bunker’ and ‘Sickle Bunker’ which are very difficult to locate accurately. In effect, it means that, with the lack of any other written archive to go with this material, named discovery locations, where they exist, can only be regarded as a very general find spot. Where possible, this material is discussed by its apparent findspot, and the illustration catalogue has been prepared in the same way.

The ‘mounds’ of Tentsmuir

There are references to a double row of about a dozen mounds or kitchen middens extending NE-SW across Tentsmuir over a distance of c. 300 m in 1905 (Paul 1905, 346). Paul locates them at the southern end of Tentsmuir, about 800m due west of the mouth of the River Eden. It is possible that a numbered set of features on the first edition Ordnance Survey map dating to 1846 actually represents these mounds (illus 2). By 1955 the northern line had almost disappeared, although the southern one is described as being largely intact apart from three mounds that had been ploughed away. The mounds are described as ranging in height between 1m and 2.5m and having average diameters of 20m. The descriptions of these features would seem to imply that they represent prehistoric shell middens and it is therefore curious that all the examined pottery, discovered from any of the mounds, is medieval in date.

Illus 2 Kinshaldy and surrounding area as shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1846.
In 1955 the largest mound was excavated by the Abertay Historical Society and was found to contain cockle, periwinkle and whelk shells and sherds of white gritty pottery. It has been suggested the pottery may have come from a kiln at Garpit (NO 462 274) although on what grounds is not clear (Candow excavation report and plans 1955–56). A group of at least five circular features visible on a RAF aerial photograph of June 1954 may be the last record of these ‘mounds’ before their destruction. This area is now occupied by the main runway of Leuchars Aerodrome (Illus 3). Other mounds are no longer visible largely due to their destruction by the extensive forestry plantation that now encompasses most of Tentsmuir.

Named finds spots (Illus 1)

**Kinshaldy Mound**

Nowadays the farm of Kinshaldy is located within the forest of Tentsmuir at NO 488 238, and it is not known precisely where the ‘Mound’ was situated. This location would seem to be too far north to fit in with the description of the double rows of mounds discussed above, although Paul does also refer to other isolated examples across Tentsmuir, and Kinshaldy may have been one of these. There are 1,668 sherds in the assemblage marked as coming from Kinshaldy Mound.

**Earlshall**

The mansion of Earlshall is dated to the 16th century, but none of the material marked as coming from this area is any later than the 14th century. The Earlshall material is accessioned as coming from ‘underground midden’, ‘black bunker’, ‘Eminence Midden’, ‘cinder bunker’, ‘bunkers I and II’, ‘sloping or high midden’, ‘Long Midden’ and ‘Wards Mound Midden’. There are 1,119 sherds in the assemblage marked as being from Earlshall.

**Garpit Farm**

This farm lies at the northern end of Tentsmuir, very close to Tayport. The accessioned material includes finds from ‘Garpit Bunker’, ‘Garpit Field’ and ‘Garpit Mussel Midden by farmhouse’. There are 403 sherds in the assemblage from Garpit.

**Wards Farm**

This farm lies NNW of Earlshall on the edge of the marsh.

**Scotfield**

This is unlocated.

**Morton**

This farm lies at the northern end of Tentsmuir.

**Brackmont Farm**

This farm lies c 2 km west of Leuchars.

**Fetterdale**

This settlement lies to the south-east of Morton.

**Innes Field**

This is unlocated.
Jerusalem Howe or House, Rives Wood
This is not accurately located but may be somewhere in Reres Wood.

Flat Midden
This is unlocated.

Locations in Tentsmuir forest
Various codes and names that appear to refer specifically to areas within or on the fringes of the forest are now impossible to locate accurately. They are “Beech Bunker”, “South West Woods”, “South East Moor, south of Two trees”, “Southern Plantation”, “South Plantation south of Watch Tower” and “Dead Wood”.

The pottery (Illus 4 and 5)
There is a grand total of 5,154 sherds of pottery in the accessioned collection from Tentsmuir held by Fife Council Museums. Virtually all this material represents sherds of Scottish White Gritty Ware; a fabric that for at least 30 years has been identified as probably having a provenance local to this area. In fact it was originally christened “Leuchars Ware” due to the large numbers of sherds that were found in the vicinity (Laing 1966–67, 143). There are still no identified production sites in this part of Fife, although sources of white-firing laceware clay are readily available (Hall 1997). The minute book of the Strathclyde and Motte of Mark (Dunfries and Galloway), and dates it to between the 4th and 7th centuries AD. In a later entry in 1932, it is stated that (it) shall in future be known as the Dunadd—Tentsmuir pottery” (St Andrews Prehistorians unpublished). The similarities between “E” ware and white gritty fabrics have long been recognised, and are still a source of discussion between early historic specialists and Scottish medieval ceramicists.

The vessel types
There is a minimum number of 4,549 vessels in the assemblage as a whole, being represented by 2,481 jugs, 2,032 jars and 36 other vessel forms. The jug forms are essentially simple strap handled forms with pulled spouts, normally either splash-glazed green or entirely unglazed. Some limited decoration is present comprising either applied strips or notched strips with a single example of a strap handle decorated with incised lines and stamped holes (cat no.13). This assemblage also contains 12 sherds in a highly fired variant of the gritty fabric, which has been previously suggested as an attempt by the potters to copy the Rhenish stonewares that begin arriving in Scotland in the 14th century (Hall 1996, 88–91). Also present are variants of the fabric that have been fired either blue-grey or pink, which are slipped white, presumably in an attempt to make the finished product look white.

Of most interest are probably the jars, with most of them almost certainly being from cooking vessels. This assemblage includes 46 fluted bifiid rims which were identified by Lloyd Laing (as long ago as 1973) as a rim form local to the Leuchars area (Laing 1973, 209). Such a high proportion of this distinctive rim form is one of the most notable things about this assemblage of pottery and may suggest that Laing’s suggestion is correct. Of particular note is the existence of pieces of vessels that possess both this distinctive rim form and two strap handles (Cat 23). The only other example of this form known to the author derives from recent excavations at Curfew Row in Perth (Hall 2000).

Amongst the other vessel forms represented are internally glazed baseshehrs from at least 19 open forms possibly bowls. Internally glazed bowls in Scottish White Gritty fabric were also found during excavations at the Leper Hospital of the Blessed Nicholas, St Andrews in 1986/87 (Hall 1995, 48–75). There are also two rim forms from storage jars (cat 12) and two basal angles from curfews (Cat. nos 8 and 37). There are only two possible pieces of kiln waste in the assemblage, represented by a bodysopher from Carphi Farm that has bubbled green glaze which runs over the break in the sherd, and a stone that has splashes of green glaze on its surface. There is no trace of anything that can be identified as kiln furniture.

Catalogue of illustrated pottery

Kinshaldy Mound

Scottish White Gritty Ware

Jugs
1. Flimsherd and narrow strap handle from green glazed jug. 10 cm rim diameter (Marked P Km IV (V) acc 1891)

Jars
2. Flimsherd from jar in blue grey fabric with pink brown external surfaces (Marked P Km Mi x 2 ac 1886)
3. Flimsherd from jar with fluted bifiid rim (Marked P Km 3 acc 1889)
4. Rim and strap handle from jar (marked T.M.Km 3 x 34 acc 1896)
5. Rim and strap handle junction from jar in fabric with blue grey core and white slipped external brown surfaces (acc 2116)
6. Narrow staggered strap handle in pink brown fabric with traces of white slip (Marked Kins Md 22.2.34 acc 2119)
7. Narrow strap handle with two pierced holes (Marked Tm Km 3 acc 2058)

Other vessels
8. Basal angle from internally smoke blackened curfew (Marked P Km 3 acc 2058)
Earlsull

Scottish White Gritty Ware

Jars
9 Rimsherd from jar (Marked T.M. E.H. Mi 3 acc 1889)
10 Jointing rimsherd and spout handle from jar with flared bifid rim (Marked T.M. E.H. Mi 1G acc 2061)
11 Rimsherd from jar with slightly flared rim (Marked P.E.H. Wc acc 1889)
12 Rimsherd from storage vessel (marked Earlsull Sloping Midden 24th Feb 1984 acc 1898)

Garrit Farm, Westerlee House, St Andrews
and unlocated findspots in Tentsmuir Forest

Scottish White Gritty Ware

Jugs
13 Rimsherd and pulled spout from green glazed jug (Marked Dr Blair Tayport acc 1902)
14 Slightly stabbed strap handle from unglazed vessel (Acc 1891)
15 Strap handle decorated with stabbed holes and incised lines with patch of green glaze (acc 2075)
16 Saggling basesherd from unglazed jug (Marked T.M. J.H. Wilson Midden acc 1900)

Jars
17 Rimsherd and stabbed strap handle junction (Marked Westerlee S.A. 30/4/35 acc 2153)
18 Rim and stabbed strap handle junction from jar in fabric with blue grey core and white slipped external brown surfaces (acc 1895)
19 Rimsherd from jar (Acc 1886)
20 Rimsherd with traces of external applied strip (acc 1886)
21 Rimsherd from jar with single thumbmark (acc 1886)
22 Rimsherd from jar (acc 1886)
23 Rimsherd from jar (acc 2083)
24 Rimsherd from jar with external smoke blackening (acc 1886)
25 Two rims and complete strap handle from externally smoke blackened jar with flared bifid rim (acc 1897)
26 Rimsherd and sidewall profile from externally smoke blackened jar with flared bifid rim and slight external rilling (Marked J.H. Wilson Midden acc 1899)
27 Rimsherd from jar with flared bifid rim (Marked T.M.F. IG x34 Acc 1889)
28 Rimsherd from jar with flared bifid rim (Marked x32 acc 1889)
29 Rimsherd from jar with flared bifid rim (Marked x33 acc 1889)
30 Rimsherd from jar with flared bifid rim (marked x8 acc 1889)
31 Rimsherd from jar with flared bifid rim (Marked x4 acc 1889)
32 Rimsherd from jar with flared bifid rim (acc 2105)
33 Rimsherd from jar with slightly flared cordon (Marked x4 acc 1889)

34 Strap handle fragment with external smoke blackening (acc 1891)
35 Stabbed strap handle with external smoke blackening (acc 1891)
36 Narrow rod handle junction from Unglas vessel (acc 1899)

Other Vessels
37 Basal angle from internally smoke blackened curfew (Marked T.M.F. F2 acc 2098)
38 End of folded skellet handle (acc 1889)

East Coast Redware

Jug
39 Complete rim and strap handle from green glazed jug with pulled spout (acc 1897)

Discussion

There is no doubt that this assemblage adds some further useful data regarding the Scottish White Gritty Ware industry, which is the subject of ongoing research (Will et al forthcoming). Initially it was assumed that this group of material must indicate the presence of pottery production centres in the Tentsmuir area, but, given the discovery of minimal amounts of kiln waste and no kiln furniture, it would appear that this assemblage actually indicates the presence of a substantial number of former medieval settlements in this area.

The curious 'mounds' discussed above presumably represent the midden waste produced by occupation of these sites, although their concentration in such a well-defined area and pattern does seem rather curious suggesting as it does the apparent existence of a significant number of previously unrecorded medieval settlements in this limited area. An alternative interpretation would be that the medieval pottery derives from the re-use of earlier middens heaps in the medieval period.

The final cataloguing of this particular assemblage of pottery serves only to highlight the fact that this part of Fife may contain extensive buried landscapes of medieval date, to complement those already identified for the prehistoric period (Longworth et al 1966–67, 60–92).

Future research directions for work at Tentsmuir and its environs should include the following:

i Examination and cataloguing of the remaining groups of material from Tentsmuir that are known to exist in both the National Museum of Scotland and the McManus Galleries in Dundee.

ii Further historical and cartographic research on the sources for medieval and later Tentsmuir.

iii Archaeological survey and field evaluation to locate some or all of the findspots and to characterise the nature and date span of the archaeological deposits represented in the mounds.

iv Preparation of a management plan to protect all located sites, since they represent a unique archaeological resource.
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References


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Abstract
A sizeable group of Scottish White Gritty Ware pottery from antiquarian excavations in Tentsmuir forest is described and discussed. Recommendations are made for future research and protection in the area.

Keywords
Kinnakilly St Andrews Prehistorians shell mounds White Gritty Ware

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