

# Assessment of Ceramic Assemblage Cromarty Community Excavations 2015

Derek Hall and George Haggarty



Site of excavations looking North East as seen from the site of St Regulus Chapel



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## **Introduction**

This assemblage was assessed by the authors in Cromarty Stables on Monday 24<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

## **Quantity**

The assemblage comprises 2818 sherds from 130 contexts. 2114 of these are of medieval date, 704 are from vessels in refined industrial fabrics.

## **Provenance**

The late medieval assemblage, mainly of 14th and 15th century date, is dominated by what is in all probability a locally produced redware (2114 sherds), as with the 2013 and 2014 seasons (Hall and Haggarty 2013, Hall and Haggarty 2014). The Redware paste shows some variation, which suggests that either some shards derive from elsewhere in the North East of Scotland, or the worked clay bed was somewhat inconsistent. Included amongst the Redware shards are several examples with holes drilled through them, the examples from 5425 (1970) almost certainly indicate that this vessel had been repaired presumably with string or leather 'knitting' it together (illus 1). Other shards have holes drilled just below the rim, for example, 5403 (1960). This is a trait that the authors have identified in a pottery assemblage from the Bon Accord excavations in Aberdeen (Haggarty and Hall forthcoming). This is associated with an as yet unidentified industrial process, but thought to be fish related.

There is good evidence for a high degree of skill in the local pottery, best seen in a splash glazed jug from 5128 (1671), which has a distinctively rilled exterior surface (illus 2). There are two glazed Redware bodysherds from 5528 (2232) and 5253 (2046) which are stamped with a 'star' which is very similar to a sherd that has been retrieved from

fieldwalking at Tarradale by Muir of Ord (pers comm. E Grant). There are several joining sherds in an unidentified fabric from either a kiln prop or a jug base from contexts 5246 (2084), 5324 (2293), 5343 (1670) (illus 3). There is also a single bodysherd from 5324 (2293) which has glaze over one of its broken edges suggesting it is either a kiln waster or a second (illus 4). There are 5 spindle whorls made from reused potsherds contexts 5035 (1820), 5123 (1907), 5288 (2149), 5297 (1730), 5390 (1750) and 5397 (2109). Interestingly the one from 5123 has broken in half whilst the hole has been drilled and was never used (illus 5). This season there are only 2 possible sherds of White Gritty ware from 5284 (2619) and 5528 (2232).

There is a much smaller group of imported wares than in previous seasons being represented by Yorkshire Type Wares (2 sherds), Low Countries Greywares (1 sherd), Beauvais Single Scraffitto (2 sherds), Saintonge Whiteware (2 sherds) and four sherds of German stoneware (Raeren and Frechen). The medieval material would appear to be tightly dated to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries with three sherds of later Scottish Post Medieval Reduced Ware of 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century date in contexts 5105, 5221 and Spoil-heap. It's difficult to be sure without ICP, but some of this material has a Throsk look. Throsk is an important late pottery production site situated on the south bank of the River Forth (Caldwell & Dean 1992). Recent research shows that its wares were being traded (Haggarty & Hughes 2014). There is a single sherd of handmade heavily micaceous ware from 5299 (1652) with similarities in construction to wares from Portmohomack, but this needs to be confirmed (Hall forthcoming).

The industrial ceramic assemblage comprises sherds of Creamware, Pearlware, White Salt Glazed Stoneware, Standard White Earthenwares, Rockingham Glazed Wares, Cut Sponge and Loose Sponged Decorated Wares, Transfer-Printed Wares, Stonewares including once fired feldsparic possibly from Grays of Portobello Blackening Bottles, London and Nottingham Stonewares, Chinese Porcelain, White Slipped Redware Dairy Bowls and Crocks. Interestingly most of the later 19<sup>th</sup> century cut sponge decorated shards are probably products of the Glasgow potteries. However a few of the mid 19<sup>th</sup>

examples can be paralleled by material recovered during excavations carried out by AOC Archaeology at the site of Rathbone's of Portobello (Haggarty in preparation).

As in previous seasons, apart from a smallish group of mid 18th century Chinese Export Porcelain, White Salt Glazed Stoneware, Dipped and Banded creamware and decorated pearlwares dating from the later 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the vast majority of this material is of Victorian date. One of the Transfer Printed sherds derives from a small plate decorated with an 'Octagonal Vermicelli Church' pattern also a product of the Rathbone pottery and which almost certainly dates from the 1820's (Haggarty 2007, 53). This probably relates to similar examples identified in previous years.

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## **The Material**

### **Condition**

The pottery is marked with its context number and is bagged by context and finds number (where used).

### **Documentation**

A basic bulk sherd count by context and initial fabric identification has been produced during this assessment and is appended as separate Excel files for medieval and industrial material.

### **Chemical Analysis**

Seventeen samples, consisting of both suspected local redwares and handmade vessels, including organic tempered and heavily micaceous examples were selected for chemical analysis by Dr. Mike Hughes. These also included a shard from the possible and extremely interesting highly tempered ceramic baking oven and a partially reconstructed Redware vessel from the excavations in the walled garden (Birch forthcoming).

## **Statement of Potential**

### **Pottery Assemblage**

The 2015 season assemblage provides yet further evidence for a possible local Redware industry including other examples of the somewhat distinctive method of handle attachment on or just below the rim. The presence of two similar stamp impressed sherds is of interest and when associated with a similar example from Tarradale (east of Muir of Ord), may suggest a widespread distribution of these wares. The possible kiln prop and waster sherd offer tantalising evidence for local pottery manufacture in the vicinity.

Potential high medieval, Scottish White Gritty Wares are represented this season by only two sherds and those imported wares present are also represented by very few sherds and are almost certainly residual. It is of interest that the two sherds of mid 16th century Beauvais Scraffitto are from different vessels and certainly hint at high status occupation in the vicinity. In Scotland these wares often occur on religious sites with excavations at Jedburgh and Shuttle Street priory producing most (Haggarty 213, 85, fig 6).

The site still lacks a significant assemblage of early 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> century ceramics but the presence of sherds of such date in the assemblages from all seasons so far undertaken suggests that such material has yet to be recovered from deposits remaining to be investigated.



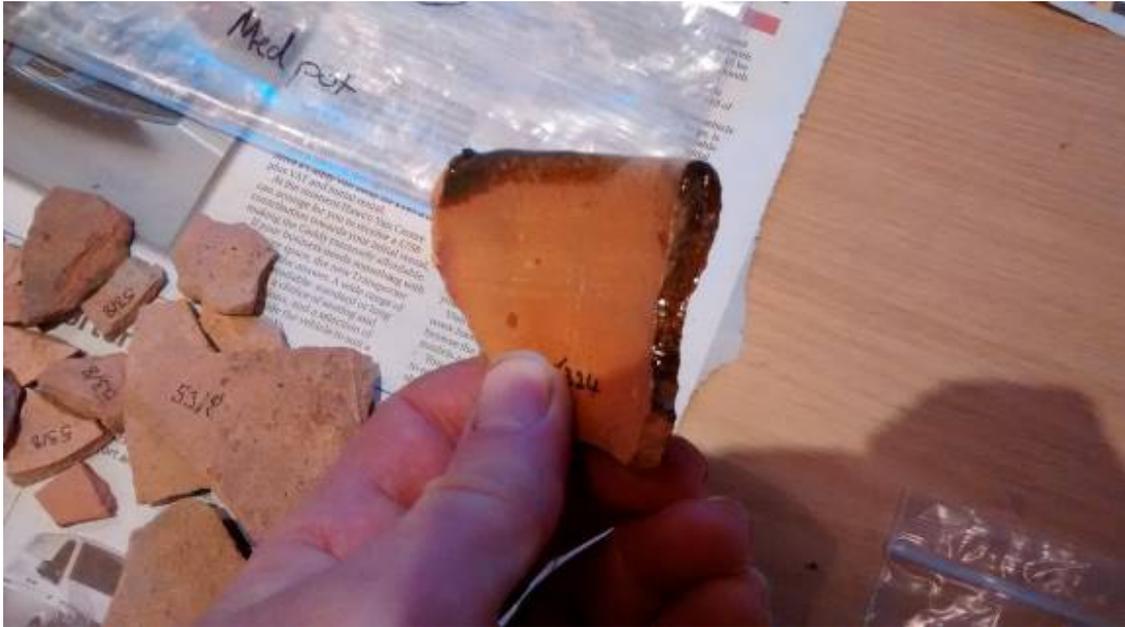
**(Illus 1)** Drilled holes used to repair a Scottish Redware pottery vessel from 5425 (1671)  
This type of repair may be unique from a Scottish context.



**(Illus 2)** Shards from a well thrown splash glazed Scottish Redware jug showing distinctive external rilling from 5128 (1671)



(Illus 3) Vessel base either from a jug copying German Stoneware or kiln prop, from 5246 (2084), 5324 (2293), 5343 (1670)



**(Illus 4)** Scottish Redware rimsherd from 5324 with glaze on one broken edge, either a second or a waster.



**(Illus 5)** Pottery spindle whorl broken during manufacture from 5123 (1907)

## References

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