

KNOCKDERRY CASTLE: POTTERY SHERDS FROM THE KITCHEN

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On the 24th February, 2024, members of the North Clyde Archaeological Society were excavating below floor-level in the kitchen of Knockderry Castle, Argyll and Bute. They discovered a small collection of pottery sherds in a void low down in the internal wall between the kitchen and the adjacent corridor.

It was noticed immediately that some of the sherds had back-stamps (i.e. stamps on the exterior base) which included the year '1942'. This led to research into the ceramics industry in the UK in World War II, as well as an investigation into the three potteries mentioned on some of the back-stamps.



The UK ceramics industry in World War II



In 1939, UK pottery production was declining fast as many ceramics workers were joining the armed forces or switching to war-work. Exports declined but the government placed large orders of china for civilian and military canteens and hospitals. In 1941, the Board of Trade classified all potteries as *nucleus*, *concentrated* or *closed down*, thus reducing the number of factories operating. By 1942, the whole ceramics industry came under government control and the majority of potteries were only allowed to produce whiteware in a restricted number of shapes. This was part of the 'Utility' programme which restricted the production of all domestic goods to a few basic designs during the War and for a few years afterwards. The whiteware was white and glazed but no decoration or colour was permitted. The products belonged to the government which then distributed them for 'official' use. Maximum prices were fixed at three levels, and this is reflected in the letters A, B, and C which occur on the

back-stamps. As Knockderry Castle was known to have housed recuperating Free French personnel, this is presumably how such china came to be there.

The potteries represented in the Knockderry kitchen sherds

1. Barker Brothers Limited of Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, England.

Founded in 1876, Barker Bros became a limited company in 1882. Production continued until the business closed in 1981.

Knockderry sherds from Barker Bros Ltd: Plate 1; Plate 2.



2. Bridgeness Pottery of Bo'ness, Scotland.

Founded in 1887 by Charles Wason (C. W.) McNay, and officially opened in 1888. The business closed in 1959.

Knockderry sherd from Bridgeness Pottery: Bowl 1.

3. Swinnertons Limited of Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, England.

Founded by Bertram John Swinnerton in 1885, the business became a limited company in 1911. The company was taken over by the Lawley Group in 1959 which was in turn taken over by Allied English Potteries in 1964 but the Swinnerton name survived until at least 1968.

Knockderry sherd from Swinnertons Ltd: Bowl 2.

Catalogue of the Knockderry kitchen Utility pottery

All the sherds are plain white and glazed on the exterior and interior. All back-stamps appear in black on the exterior base.



Plate 1

A near complete plate consisting of nine conjoined sherds.

Diameter: 170 mm. Height: approx. 17 mm.

Back-stamp (incomplete). Restored wording or explanations are in square brackets:

B

(in an arc)

[ROYAL TUDOR]

WARE

[image of a crown]

BARKER BROS. LTD.

G. ^{vi} R.

1942

Explanations: the large letter 'B' refers to the maximum permitted price of the item (see above); 'G. R.' stands for 'Georgius Rex', i.e. King George, with a Roman '6' between the letters, standing for King George VI.

Illus. nos 4, 5, and 6.

Plate 2

Half a plate consisting of five conjoined sherds.

Diameter: 170 mm. Height: approx. 17 mm.

Back-stamp (incomplete). Restored wording or explanations are in square brackets:

(in an arc)

ROY[AL TUDOR WARE]

[fragment of a crown image]

G. ^{vi} R.

1942



Explanations: see under Plate 1.

Illus. nos 7 and 8.

Plate 3

Fragment of a plate consisting of two conjoined rim sherds.

Diameter: probably 170 mm. Height: probably approx. 17 mm. (These measurements assumed from Plates 1 and 2).

Back-stamp: none.



Bowl 1

Half a large bowl consisting of four conjoined sherds.

Diameter: 150 mm. Height: approx. 93 mm.

Back-stamp (incomplete). Restored wording or explanations are in square brackets:

C. W.

McNAY & [SONS]

G. ^{vi} R.

1942

Explanations: see under Plate 1.

Illus nos. 9 and 10.

Bowl 2

Part of a small bowl or, possibly, a saucer.

Diameter: approx. 180 mm. Height: approx. 30 mm.

Back-stamp (incomplete). Restored wording or explanations are in square brackets.

[G. ^{vi}] R.

[SWINNER]TONS

LTD



1942

Explanations: see under Plate 1.

Illus. no. 11.

Cup 1

Almost half a cup, consisting of one sherd and lacking any part of the rim.

Diameter of base-ring: approx. 55 mm. Height: unknown.

Back-stamp (half of the base is missing):

1942

Miscellaneous sherds

Six rim sherds; one base sherd.

Forms: cups and bowls.

Back-stamps: none surviving.