

Addendum excavations at Millbrae Cottages, 2017.

Tam Ward 2017

Abstract

Further pottery of 19th century Scottish manufacture was recovered from an extended excavation, a significant collection of 17th century sherds were found, along with a few sherds of 18th century pottery and glass. The intention was to recover a more conclusive pottery assemblage of all periods to support and elaborate on previous findings, while much 19th century material was located and less of the earlier vessels was found, the new work does not alter the general composition of the overall assemblage to any great degree. However, two flint scrapers were also found thus showing a pre-historic presence on the area. A used gun flint, a lead pistol ball and a strip of unused buckshot, also support the similar finds previously recovered and which are evidence of the gamekeepers who occupied the site.

Introduction

This report should be read in conjunction with the main report on the site (Ward et al 2016) and the specialist report on early bottle glass from the site (Murdoch 2016).

Given the local importance of the pottery assemblage retrieved at the excavation of Millbrae Cottages, where a diverse collection of Scottish early 19th century pottery was recovered along with smaller amounts of 18th and 17th century sherds of unknown manufacturing provenance, and early 18th century bottle and possibly window glass of the same period, work was resumed at the site in the hope of establishing more conclusive results, especially regarding the ceramic finds.

The area of sloping ground in front of the eastern end of the main building (Fig 1) was chosen for further work based on knowledge gained in the main excavation; where concentrations of the three periods of pottery were previously found.

For the purposes of this report only the earlier material and various small finds have been added to the original catalogue. The large quantity of 19th C pottery and glass recovered will be included in a revised report on the entire assemblage in due course, when better research has been undertaken.

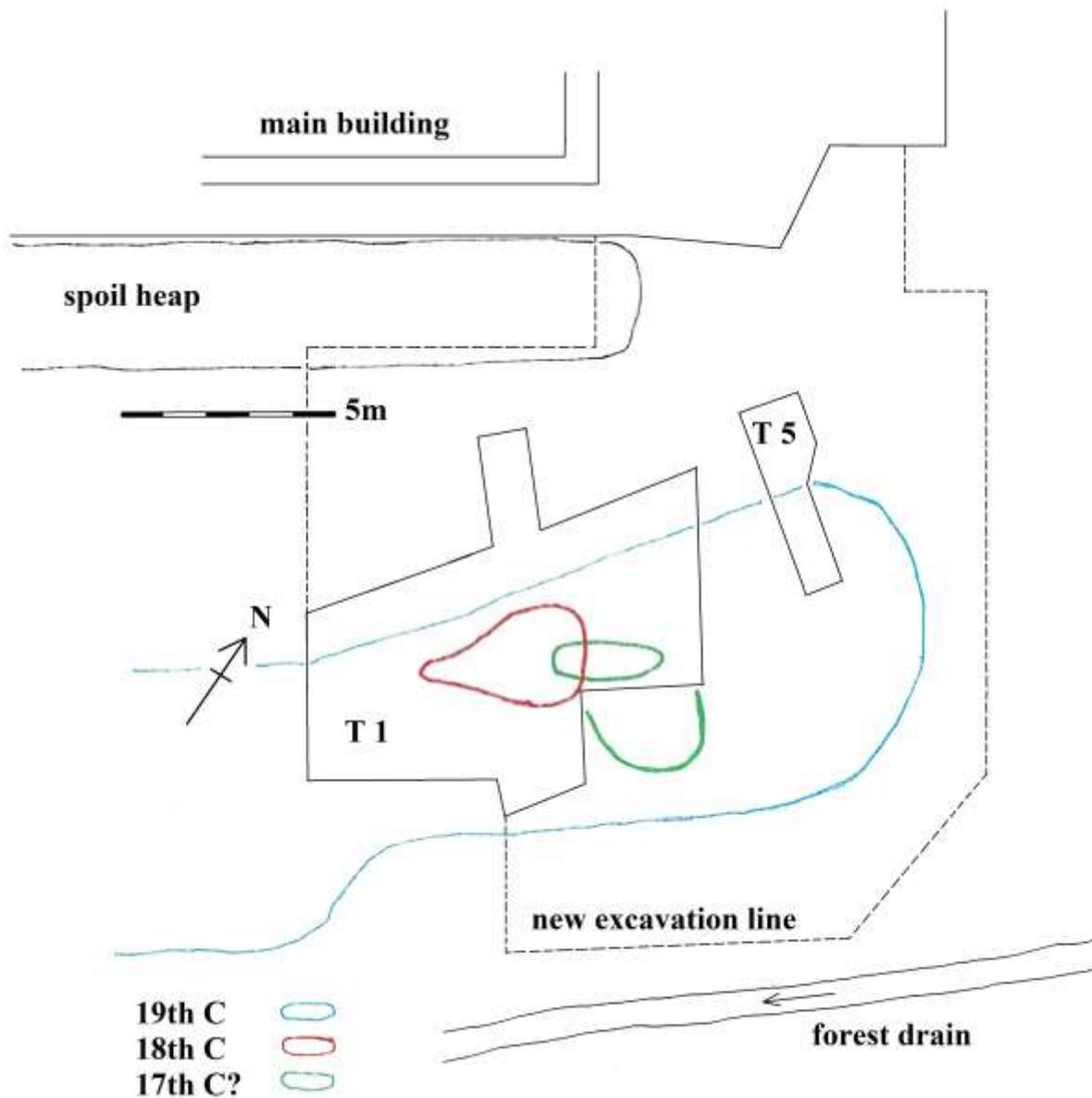


Fig 1. Showing new excavation line encompassing Trenches 1 and 5.

Results

An additional circa 170 square metres were excavated by hand tools only, and which surrounded (but not included in area) former Trenches No's 1 and 5 (Fig 1). Almost all the ground within the new boundaries was excavated excluding small areas which lay below tree trunks, however, these were trowelled out as far as was practicable, the tree trunks are not shown on plan.

The excavation showed that the previously identified cultivated garden area did not extend much into the new zone on the eastward side, indicating the cultivated ground at least lay directly in front of the cottages, and not what was suggested on the 1st Ed OS maps.

The ground profile consisted of a covering of forestry brash over the post abandonment surface of the ground which included much rock and broken brick, presumably from the demolition of the buildings. In various thicknesses below this lay an occupational ground surface which included much coal fragments and the finds recorded here, an equally varying depth of old ground surface (ogs) lay between the occupation layer and the till and bedrock below. All was steeply sloping ground which ran down to a new forest open drain, the excavation was restricted to between 1 and 2m upslope from the drain. At some points crockery was noted in the open drain sides, indicating the extent of discard around the site remains greater than the ground exposed in this second phase of operations. Unfortunately, the upper areas of the new excavations had been covered in spoil from the original work, some of which had to be removed.

An area extending down and away from the original scatter of course green glazed pottery produced further pottery, indicating the scatter was larger than first thought. Apart from occasional 18th century pot and glass sherds, the context of the early material was restricted to an ogs, but, as the earlier work had established, this had been disturbed by forestry operations.

Features

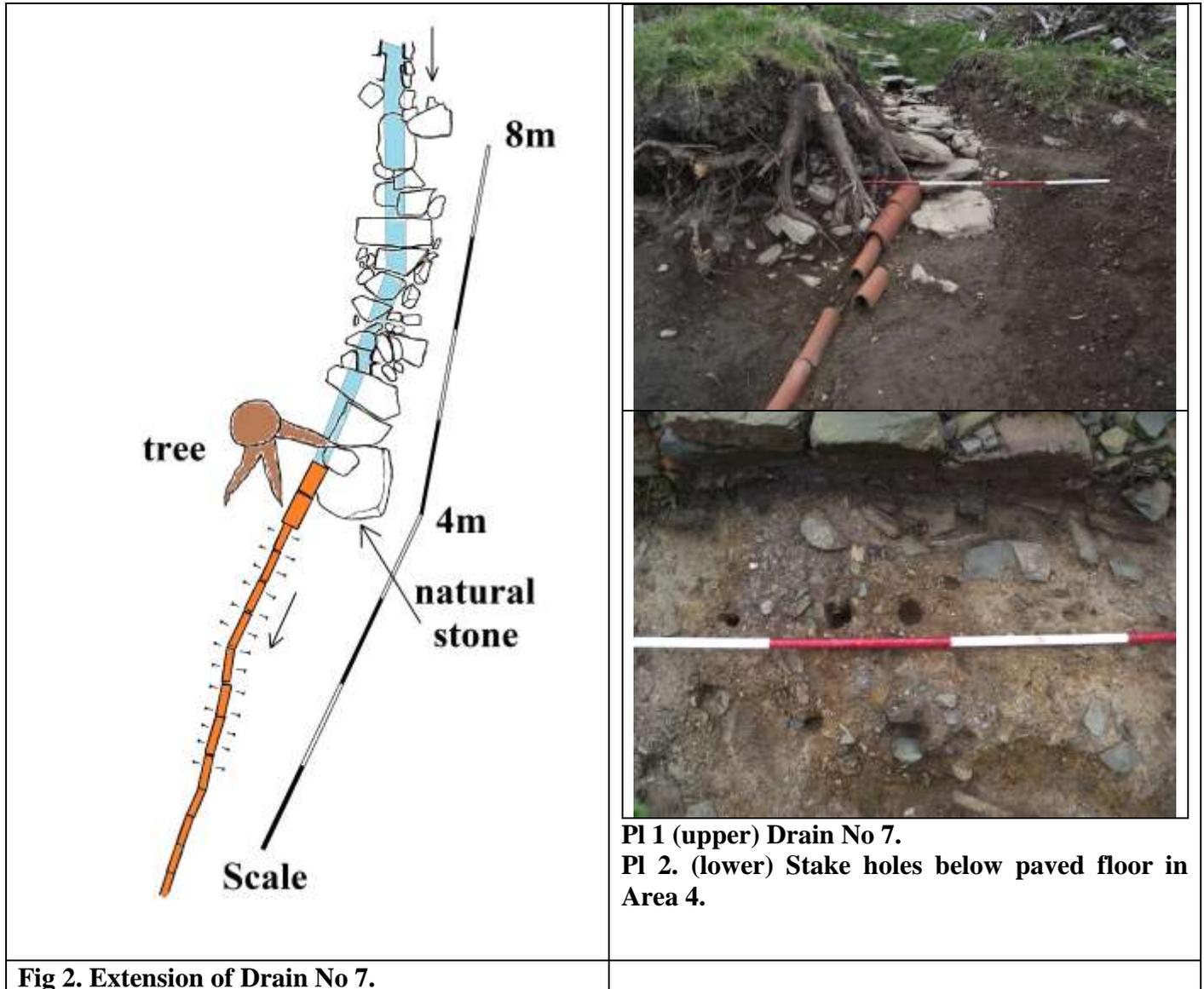
The only feature located in the new work was the continuation of Drain No 7 from Area 4 (Fig 2 & Pl 1). From the original work the drain continued down the slope as a stone covered channel, made with kerbing stones, these side stones included bricks on each side. The two lowermost covers were pushed aside and out of line by a tree root. The neatly formed drain tunnel was c150mm wide by 200mm deep. The stone part of the drain was 3.7m long and then changed to two large 'horseshoe' fireclay drain pipes, measuring 15" long x 7" wide and 7" high [380x180x180mm] which then gave way to a run of twelve smaller drain pipes and of similar design and measuring 14" long x 4.5" wide and 4.5" high [360x115x115mm]. Both large and small pipes were ¾" [22mm] thick. The smaller pipes had been cut slightly into the till and all were tightly butted together however the entire length of the drain was silted up completely. The total length of the drain from Area 4 was 9m and it fell by 1m in height down the natural slope. Only a few small sherds of 19th century crockery were found in the drain silt, the same as before.

However, in Area 4 the paved flooring left in situ in Phase 1 was lifted and at least eight further stake holes (Pl 2) were found cut into the till. They are interpreted as being associated with those previously found, and possibly were used as fodder supports within a small byre. No further finds were made here.

Finds

The finds are mostly summarised here as research and final cataloguing remains to be done on the entire collections from the site [the next phase of the work], however, some miscellaneous items have been added to the original catalogue and are appended below. The finds were merely recorded to two general areas; being that part of ground upslope from Trenches 1 and 5, and the ground below them.

The same scenario as the main excavation was repeated where forestry disturbed objects were dislocated onto the surface and sometimes being reburied in an ad hoc manner, in situ items of 19th century date were recovered from both the occupational zone and occasionally impressed into the ogs where the earlier finds were located.



Discussion

The U-shaped fireclay drain pipes of Drain No 7 were earlier than the ‘tunnel’ pipes used at the cottage, it was in 1845 that extruded drain pipes were invented by one Thomas Scragg, before that time the U-shaped drain pipes were hand made.

As with the previous work the ground was much disturbed by forestry operations, confusingly, early pottery was found on the surface having been lifted out during the *original* forestry work

some four decades ago, while similar finds were made in situ (Pl 3) and immediately below at the interface with the old ground surface and the natural till. Of interest was the additional green glaze and coarse sherds of supposed 17th century date (e.g. Pl 4), these mostly came from just lower on the slope where the concentration of the same pottery was previously found (Fig 1), although a few pieces were located further afield, the scatter, was still fairly discrete in chronology and in area, although some early glass was found intermixed with it.

	
<p>Pl 3. 17th C sherds from ogs.</p>	<p>Pl 4. Decorated green glaze sherds. MB/Ce/253</p>

The 19th century scatter of material did not extend eastwards as far as was originally thought, its true extent has been more accurately recorded (Fig 1). Five full buckets of crockery and glass were recovered from the lower part of the work and only a single bucket full came from the upper area.

The general picture of finds location was the same as the main work on the slope in front of the cottages, very few finds were made above the two former trenches right across the area, this was the same as before, including the excavated area immediately in front of the buildings (in the first phase of work). The nearer one got to the buildings the less were the finds and at the uppermost levels, they were practically non-existent, the front of the cottages produced very little in terms of finds during the main work. The reason for this is most likely that foot traffic in front of the cottages probably removed any larger objects and garden cultivation in front of the path appears to have done the same. The vast bulk of finds came from lower on the slope and the greatest concentrations were at the base of the slope, clearly showing that discarded rubbish from the site was mostly being thrown beyond the garden line.

However, at the upper level and in front of Area 4, an extensive deposit of coal dross and burnt soil was found, measuring up to 200mm deep in its centre and tailing out at the sides, it stretched for over 3m in line with the building but extended out from it for about 6m. The only finds from this deposit were a few tiny 19th century sherds of decorated pottery and the strip of buckshot pellets [MB/L/8].

Beginning with the earlier objects:

The two flint scrapers, a chunk of flint, found in the ogs, and possibly three flint pebbles (Pl 5) are proof that pre-historic activity took place in the area, a flint flake was found in the previous work but as such was rather inconclusive as to its relevance. Of the new finds one scraper is steep sided and half round and has been modified from a split pebble, the other; a larger primary flake has edge wear on both sides but a notch and flake from its distal end may indicate modification as a burin, making it a multiple tool (Pl 5). Another freshly struck chunk was found and all three appear to be the same type of flint. However, three small chunks, one split and two smoothed with patination may be more recent, such pieces are picked up in nearby fields and are suspected to be derived from the Greenock potteries where flint was used for making glazes. Expert analyses of these items would be required to be more specific, but without better contextual evidence the two tools may be attributed to any period between the Mesolithic and Bronze Ages.



The green glaze/course pottery is an important addition to the previous collection, a complete base with carbonised encrustation over broken surfaces indicates it was broken and then subject to burning, two other base sherds from different pots were found. Seven fragments of green glaze handles, all incompatible and from large jugs, were found. There were four rim parts, one of which is salt glazed. One sherd shows an interrupted wavy design on the shoulder and at least seven sherds (Pl 4) from another pot show a cordon of decoration of four lines running around the body and angled lines above it. Taken with the remaining miscellaneous forty-seven sherds, several vessels are represented.

Rather surprisingly only three sherds of 18th century slip wear was found; however, all are rim sherds.

A base sherd from an early 18th century onion bottle and three conjoining body sherds complement those previously found (Murdoch 2016) as does the neck and lip of a medicine bottles (Pl 6). The other small bottle lips may be later in date (Pl 6). Some sherds of window glass also represent both the 18th and 19th centuries. A larger collection of early to mid-19th century black glass was recovered, unsurprisingly. A further 19th century aqua square sheared lip ink bottle was found.

The used gun flint and unspent pistol ball of lead (Pl 7) also compliment those already found. Similarly, a strip of 20 No 2 buckshot pellets (Pl 8) still conjoined by the lead strip from the two-part mould they were cast in (see Pl 9), shows the gamekeepers were making their own shot. It was probably used for wildfowling. Sometimes the shot moulds were double sided, if so, 40 pellets could be made at a time. The gun flints from the site are similar in type, being a dark coloured flint, to those manufactured at Brandon in England where a major industry existed, making millions of them for worldwide trade.



Pl 7. Gun flint and pistol ball (unspent). MB/S/13 & MB/L/9



Pl 8. Moulded buckshot. MB/L/8



Pl 9. Gunshot mould, screenshot from the Web.



Pl 10. Candle trimmer and ring. MB/Ca/26 & MB/Ca/27 (ring).

Buttons of both copper alloy and glass similar to those found before were recovered, as were tiny ceramic dolls legs. Three and a half clay marbles bring the total for the site to forty.

A single coin, a George (III?) halfpenny, much worn, was found.

Two copper alloy finds are noteworthy (Pl 10); one half of candle trimming scissors and a thin ring of unknown purpose were found with the early pottery and are assumed to date to the same period.

[The full list of finds is in the appendix]

Conclusion

Apart from the two flint tools which indicate a pre-historic presence on the area, no significant difference to the previous interpretation of the site was possible. The ground extending from the front of the cottages was shown to be fairly level for about 6m, unfortunately about 4m of this distance is now covered in the substantial spoil heap from the original work. Despite the two pot querns and the now significant quantity of early pottery and glass from both programmes of work, no evidence of a building was found to explain the presence of these finds. It remains a possibility that such evidence may yet lie below the frontal spoil heap on the site.

Acknowledgement

Firstly, NCAS is grateful to Mr Stephen Tong of Tilhill Forestry for permission to re-commence the work at Millbrae.

The following Society members took part in the excavations: Carole Biggam, Jim Chestnut, Anne Evans, Su Floyd, Alasdair Jamieson, Sandra Kelly, Alastair McIntyre, Nick Maidment, Kate Murphy, Louise Porter, Douglas Rogers, Helen Rogers, Tam Ward; who organised and supervised the work.

References

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www.spanglefish.com/northclydearchaeologicalsociety.com

Ward T & McIntyre A 2016. *The excavation of early 19th century cottages at Millbrae and the survey and excavation of various pre-historic sites at Rosneath Peninsula, Argyll.*

www.spanglefish.com/northclydearchaeologicalsociety.com

Appendix. List of finds.

As with the main excavations, masses of 19th century pottery and glass sherds were recovered, while some of this has been reconstructed both physically, and by computer, a final phase of such work will now be done, amalgamating if necessary finds from different areas of the work. More thorough research will also be done on the site and assemblages to bring the work to a final conclusion and report.

Only specific items have therefore been catalogued and in this paper the numbers run on from the previous report.

Stone.

MB/S/9 **Plate 5.** Flint scraper, 25x26x10mm, steep sides end and edge retouch, made from a split pebble with cortex surviving, grey mottled flint. [upper area above T1].

MB/S/10 **Plate 5.** Flint, scraper? secondary flake with edge wear both sides, 43x25x7mm, grey mottled flint. [upper area above T1].

MB/S/11 Flint, struck chunk, 33x30x15mm, with cortex, grey mottled flint. [upper area above T1].

MB/S/12 Flint, three of small pebbles >25mm, [various areas]. May be modern.

MB/S/13 **Plate 7.** Gun flint, 22x15x5mm, used. Dark brown flint = Brandon? 19th C.

Sample. Small sample of burnt schistose stone.

Copper alloy

MB/Ca/26 **Plate 10.** One half of a pair of candle trimming scissors, 115x17x3mm, ornate handle may be a broken finger loop, with traces of pivot the other blade and for the box. [found with 17/18th C pottery, lower area.

MB/Ca/27 **Plate 10.** Plain ring, 26mm external diameter, 2mm thick. [found with 17/18th C pottery, lower area.

MB/Ca/28 Canvas/fabric eyelet? 30mm total dia' x 20mm internal ring dia' x 4mm thick. Nine squared cog like projections, irregular in size >5x3mm,

MB/Ca/29 Stamped metal, 35x22x4mm, brooch/badge/buckle fragment, with thistle head and down well defined, formerly gilded. Possibly a spear thistle often depicted on Scottish emblems. 19th C.

MB/Ca/30 George III? halfpenny, much worn.

MB/Ca/31 Buttons, five of, toggle and two holed, one with ceramic fragment.

MB/Ca/32 Tube/handle? 65mm long x 6mm diameter. Close one end.

MB/Ca/33 Fragments of sheet, possibly from a rounded vessel [upper area].

Glass

- MB/G/82 Buttons, 4of, white opaque, four holes. 19th C.
- MB/G/83 Either the corner of a 19thC window pane or part of base of large aqua bottle, 110x70x4mm thick. [Firebright].
- MB/G/84 Five pieces of 18thC window glass >85x50x1.5mm thick. [all areas].
- MB/G/85 Half of a base of a black glass 'mallet' bottle, 120x40mm. [lower area].
- MB/G/86 Conjoining shoulder sherds (3of) of an 18th C onion bottle. Bottle of circa 150mm body diameter [lower area].
- MB/G/87 Neck of early 19th C mallet black glass bottle, 90mm x32mm diameter flattened rim.
- MB/G/88 Neck and part shoulder of early 19th C mallet black glass bottle, 120mm x40mm diameter string rim.
- MB/G/89 Miscellaneous black glass sherds 16of, some early.
- MB/G/90 **Plate 6.** Neck and part shoulder of 18th C olive green medicine bottle, internal dia' 10mm. [lower area].
- MB/G/91 **Plate 6.** Base of clear glass medicine bottle? 43mm diameter. 18/19thC.
- MB/G/92 **Plate 6.** Neck and base of clear glass medicine bottle, body 25mm diameter, neck internal 11mm diameter. 19thC.
- MB/G/93 Miscellaneous aqua sherds 3of, 18/19thC. [all areas].
- MB/G/94 **Plate 6.** Three necks and rims of aqua glass bottles > 36mm diameter rims 18/19thC. [all areas].
- MB/G/95 Square aqua sheared lip ink bottle, 40x40mm. 19thC. [upper area].

Lead

- MB/L/6 Strip of moulded buckshot, bent and one part broken off. 110x50mm. Twenty pellets measure 0.27" [6.86mm] in diameter which equals to No 2 buckshot, often used in blunderbuss guns and for wildfowling. If a double-sided lead shot mould was used, forty pellets could be cast at the same time. 19th C.
- MB/L/7 Pear shaped flat piece, 45x32x2mm thick. Indeterminate.
- MB/L/8 **Plate 8.** Part of a strip of gunshot pellets, no actual pellets attached. 32x15x10mm.
- MB/L/9 **Plate 7.** Pistol ball, 14mm diameter, unspent.

Leather

MB/Le/5 Part of heel leather, strip 60x10x3mm, with eleven copper alloy nails c1mm square.

Ceramic

MB/Ce/239 Five and two half clay marbles, [all areas].

MB/Ce/240 Fragment of dolls leg and foot, white glaze 15x6mm. Also, small ceramic white glazed tube 15x6mm.

Unless otherwise stated all 17/18thC items following were found below the original area of the same material.

MB/Ce/241 Complete base sherd of course ware pot, foot = 120mm diameter, buff fabric with spiral finger fluting on internal side, broken edges covered in carbonised deposits. 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/242 Course ware base sherd, foot c120mm diameter, grey fabric. 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/243 Green glaze (both sides) base sherd, c120mm diameter base. Orange-grey fabric 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/244 Green glaze strap handle, 75x30x10mm. Grey fabric. [from upper area]

MB/Ce/245 Green glaze strap handle (part of) and part of upper body, 50x50mm total. Grey fabric. 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/246 Part of green glaze strap handle and lower body, 70x40mm total. Grey fabric. 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/247 Three fragments of body sherds with handle scars > 90x70mm. Grey fabric. 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/248 Rim sherd of course ware, grey fabric, 75x40x15mm thick. Rim diameter = c 220mm. 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/249 Everted rim sherd of green glaze, grey fabric, 65x30x10mm thick. Rim diameter = c 120mm. 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/250 Rim fragment of green glaze 30x20x12mm thick. 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/251 Everted rim sherd of salt glaze (both sides), grey fabric, 50x25x5mm thick, rim diameter = c80mm. 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/252 Shoulder sherd with tiny part of flat rim, green glaze external only grey fabric, 80x60x8mm thick. 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/253 **PLATE 4.** Shoulder sherds from a green glaze jug (7of), external glaze only, grey fabric. Showing design of four incised ring grooves as a single cordon, above which zig zag lines. 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/254 Shoulder sherds from a green glaze jug, 90x75x7mm thick, external glaze only, grey fabric. Showing design of broken wavy lines below neck. 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/255 Miscellaneous body sherds and fragments (47of), green glaze and unglazed, orange and grey fabrics, 17/18thC.

MB/Ce/256 Rim sherd, red earthenware slip ware, brown glaze both sides and yellow trail over everted lip, rim diameter 120mm. 45x25x3mm thick. Early 18th C.

MB/Ce/257 Rim sherd, red earthenware slip ware, brown glaze both sides and yellow trail over everted lip plus slip trail inside, rim diameter 120mm. 25x20x3mm thick. Early 18th C.

MB/Ce/258 Rim sherd, red earthenware slip ware, brown glaze both sides and yellow trail over inside lip only, rim diameter 120mm. 40x22x3mm thick. Early 18th C.

Tortoiseshell

MB/Tortoiseshell/1 Comb fragment, 82x25x1mm thick. Probably one half of a fine/course comb c130mm long, fine teeth are 1mm apart and others 2mm apart. 19th C.

Footnote

The large assemblage of 19thC pottery and glass recovered in this phase of the work will be researched along with the previous collections and be included in a final revised report on Millbrae Cottages.