

## **Imported post-medieval pottery from a site in Nottingham (JSAC 645)**

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Two large and important groups of post-medieval pottery were excavated by JSAC in Nottingham (Site 645). That from Cave 1 dates to the late 17<sup>th</sup> / early 18<sup>th</sup> century whilst that from context 117 has a closing date in the 1760s. This report deals solely with the imported wares.

### **Cave 1**

Two sherds of a Chinese Export Porcelain bowl. The surviving sherds are from the base and about a third of the body. The rim is missing. The vessel is decorated in under-glaze blue. The surviving portion shows a bush with flowers with thin stems and flowers and a bird. It appears that the decoration was limited to these motifs and substantial areas of the exterior were plain. The interior of the vessel is completely plain.

The vessel is quite small and plain and is typical of the type of Chinese porcelain found in England in archaeological contexts in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Context 117**

A Chinese Export porcelain cup (DN11). Decorated with underglaze cobalt blue in a similar manner to that of the bowl from Cave 1. Three motifs are present, all floral. There is a small stylised flower in the centre of the base internally and a band of cross-hatched decoration around the inside of the rim. This vessel is similar to numerous examples of early 18<sup>th</sup> century date and could be an heirloom of this period.

A Chinese Export porcelain bowl (DN10). Decorated in famille rose enamels and gilt. Only a fragment of the decoration survives but it can be seen that it is much more elaborate than the blue and white pieces from the site. Such pieces became more common during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and this one could be contemporary with the remainder of the group dating perhaps to c.1730 to c.1770.

Parts of two Westerwald stoneware mugs (DN12 and DN13). The more complete vessel (DN13) consists of two separate sherds, one forming the rim and the other the base of the vessel. Unfortunately the central part of the pot is missing. The vessel is a globular mug, one of the two most common forms found in this ware in England. The neck is closely ribbed, a form first found in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, and is decorated with a perfunctory band of manganese purple. The base is decorated with a simple moulding, which is not enhanced with paint. The body decoration can be broadly reconstructed and seems to have consisted of two identical horizontal zones on either side of a central band of freehand chequerwork in which alternate lozenges were painted blue. The top and bottom bands consist of stylised flowers applied using a stamp with a wavy outer line and two concentric plain circles. The central 'stamen' and 'petals' were painted blue. The spaces between these flowers were filled with

simple stamped dots. Those closest to central band were grouped into triangles. The bands were separated by groups of two parallel lines. A band of rapidly applied zig-zag scratches surrounds the base of the vessel. It is unclear whether there was ever a central motif on the vessel. If so, it would have been placed on the girth opposite the handle.

The sequence of decoration can be broadly reconstructed:

- The neck and cordon were formed on the wheel using a former, as was the moulding around the base.
- The girth of the pot was turned using a former which has caused slight juddering marks.
- The groups of parallel lines were applied whilst the pot was still on the wheel.
- The handle was applied
- The stamped and freehand decoration was applied
- The pot was painted

The second vessel, DN12, was larger and has a more elaborate decorative scheme although only the lower part of the body and base survive. It too was a globular mug with moulding around the base. On this vessel, however, one of the moulded bands has been painted blue. The body was treated as a single zone and a central motif, now missing, was surrounded by a band of decoration applied by rocking a thin rectangular tool from side to side whilst moving it along the pot. Outside of this band was scratch-blue foliage in which details of leaves were added with a ring stamp. A smaller ring stamp was used to produce dots, used singly and in triangles in the spaces between the leaves and stems.

The style of these two vessels is typical of the latest phase of Westerwald stoneware to be exported to England in quantity. The distinguishing features are: The use of scratch-blue engraving, simple stamps and rocker-applied decoration. An elaborate example of this style is illustrated by Gaimster who dates it to c.1750-75 1997, No.133).

A London stoneware bottle (DN15). Only the rim, neck and top half of the body survive. Nevertheless, it is clear that the vessel does not have a medallion opposite the handle. An irregular grooved line just above the girth is probably accidental. The exaggerated beading around the rim is distinctive. The handle is missing but the 'rats tail' decoration at the base of the handle survives and has a central finger impression. The vessel had an iron-rich slip covering the entire exterior of the pot running to a point about 30mm down the inside of the pot.

London stoneware can be identified by the texture and the presence of abundant black specks (altered iron-rich compounds) in the fabric. Several factories were in operation by the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and it is not possible to attribute the vessel to a specific source.

A tin-glazed tile (DN14). A square tile, 130mm square and 14mm thick with a sanded base and knife-trimmed sides. A nail hole is visible in one of the two surviving corners. One diagonal half of the tile is plain and the other painted cobalt blue with broad brush strokes.

The thickness is intermediate between that of 17<sup>th</sup>-century tin-glazed floor tiles and late 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century wall tiles which have rounded upper edges. The nail hole is likewise indicative of a date earlier than that of the remaining pit contents. 16<sup>th</sup>-century Antwerp tiles have these holes, which are thought to be caused by the use of a wooden former with nails sticking out of it during the trimming process. The earliest English tin-glazed tiles also have this feature but it seems to die out during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The sanding on the underside of the tile contains few grains larger than 0.5mm and is contaminated with an iron rich clay. Streaks of iron-rich clay are visible in the body.

The edges and the tops of irregular blemishes in the glaze have been worn but the remainder retains its glossy surface. Broken air bubbles and cracks in the surface of the glaze are filled with a black substance and a tarry deposit is present along two of the edges of the underside of the tiles. This suggests that the tile was used in a fireplace, and that soot and tar have worked their way around the tile and into all the cracks and pores.

Either an English or a Dutch source for this tile is possible but there are indications that it is of early 17<sup>th</sup>-century date (or even earlier). Chemical analysis of the fabric would probably elucidate the source as well as the date of the tile. Recent work on tiles and pottery from English and Netherlandish sources has demonstrated that it is possible to distinguish the products of Haarlem, Norwich and London from each other and from those from the main centre of production, at Antwerp. In addition, the chemical signature of early to mid 16<sup>th</sup>-century Antwerp pieces is different from that of late 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century ones. Of the centres which have been studied, only a short-lived industry in Utrecht could not be characterised, and this is probably due to the importation of both the potters and their raw materials from Antwerp (Hughes and Gaimster 1999).

## Bibliography

Gaimster, David (1997) *German Stoneware 1200-1900*. London, British Museums Publ Ltd.

Hughes, M. and Gaimster, D. (1999) "Neutron activation analysis of maiolica from London, Norwich, the Low Countries and Italy." in D. Gaimster, ed., *Maiolica in the North: the archaeology of tin-glazed earthenware in north-west Europe c.1500-1600*, British Museum Occasional Paper 122 British Museum Press, London, 57-90.