

Assessment of the Pottery from Croft Castle, Herefordshire

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Excavations carried out by Herefordshire Archaeology, Herefordshire Council, were carried out over four seasons, from 2001 to 2004. The majority of the pottery found was of post-medieval and early modern date and that from the 2001-3 seasons has been assessed by David Barker of Stoke on Trent Museum. Barker set aside sherds which he identified as being of medieval or intermediate medieval/post-medieval date and these, together with about 75% of the pottery from the 2004 season were examined by the author in September 2004.

It is considered likely that the remaining c.25% of the 2004 season's pottery will be of similar character to that from the remaining 2004 trenches, since all comes from the garden area in front of the early 17th-century house which replaced the 12th to 16th-century castle.

Description

Roman pottery

Four sherds of Romano-British pottery were recovered. One came from the 2001 season, one from trench 18 and two from trench 41. All are heavily abraded and are consistent with either a manuring scatter or casual loss. They indicate Romano-British activity in the area but without revealing anything of its nature.

Saxo-Norman pottery

Five sherds of pottery were identified as being potentially of late 11th or early 12th-century date. One of these, from trench 39, is a club-rimmed jar of Hereford Fabric D2. One from trench 29 is a club-rimmed jar of Hereford fabric C1 and the other two are sherds of Hereford fabric C1 of unspecified jar forms. In total, three sherds require illustration.

Only one of these late 11th to 12th-century sherds, the D2 vessel, could be of late 11th-century date and even that vessel is definitely of post-conquest date. The remainder might date to the early 12th century or later, with only the vessel from trench 29 being certainly that early.

These sherds indicate activity in the area in the century following the conquest and the sherds are no more abraded than those of later 12th-century and later date. Since at least two of these sherds probably pre-date the castle it is likely that they are associated with the Domesday *vill*.

Medieval pottery

A total of 659 sherds dating between the 12th and the 14th centuries was seen. The sherds include examples of handmade jars of Hereford fabrics B1 and C1 which might date to anywhere between the early 12th and the mid 13th centuries, handmade jars of Hereford fabric A4, probably of early

13th century date, and wheelthrown jars of various northern Herefordshire fabrics not present at Hereford. The latter are likely to date to the later 13th or 14th centuries.

In total, 9 sherds in this group require illustration.

Late medieval to early post-medieval pottery

A total of 41 sherds of late medieval to early post-medieval date were seen. All were of Malvern Chase glazed ware (Hereford B4) and date to the second half of the 14th, the 15th and early 16th centuries. No other wares, either English or imported, of this date were noted except for two possible sherds of Midlands whiteware, produced, amongst other places, in the potteries (for example at Sneyd Green). There was a difference in size and condition between much of this pottery and that of the earlier medieval period, suggesting that it was derived from deposits which had not been subjected to prolonged weathering and/or agriculture.

Ten sherds in this group require illustration. These include two complete profiles of Hereford A7d tripod pipkins.

Late 16th to early 17th-century pottery

One hundred and thirty sherds of mid 16th to mid 17th-century date were seen. These include Hereford B5, made at Malvern Chase between the mid 16th-century and the early 17th century, Cistercian ware cups, made outside the county (but at unknown sources). Hereford fabric A7d, probably in this case made in Lingen forest in the later 16th and the early 17th-centuries, and a handful of non-local and imported wares.

The latter wares include a sherd from a marble slipware bowl, from the Arno valley in central Italy (possibly made at Pisa) probably made in the early to mid 17th century, a Midlands Yellow ware vessel, probably of early to mid 17th-century date, a possible unglazed Spanish or southern French coarseware (similar material has been seen in Perpignan), and a small collection of tin-glazed sherds, including several sherds of an undecorated flanged plate, and a blue-decorated large cup or bowl.

Most of this material is likely to date to the early 17th century.

Later pottery

Only the later 17th-century and later pottery from the 2004 season was examined and this probably provides no clue as to the character of that from the 2002-3 seasons, assessed by Barker.

The 2004 pottery included only 5 sherds of late 17th-century or later date, 3 of early 18th-century or later date, 1 of mid 18th-century date and 62 of late 18th, 19th or 20th-century date. None of this pottery appears to be significantly stratified and is probably present as a result of manuring, replanting and other activities associated with orchards and gardens.

Assessment

It is unlikely that the remaining unseen material from the 2004 season is any different in character from that seen, since the material all comes from the landscaped area to the south of the 17th-century house and the church. However, it is more than likely that the un-examined post-medieval pottery from the 2001-3 seasons is different in character and may well include other examples of 16th- and 17th-century date which might well extend the range of fabrics and forms.

For the earlier material, it is clear that only a tiny fraction of the pottery is stratified, principally that incorporated into the earthen bank surrounding the castle. This includes sherds of Hereford fabrics B1 and C1 jars but no locally-made wares and is thus possibly datable between c.1100 and c.1175. For the remainder, the collection must be treated as an unstratified sample of the pottery used in the village and the castle although the size and condition of the sherds is consistent with their being associated with a shrunken or deserted village, whose site was subsequently open to weathering or agriculture, whereas material from the castle might be expected to be fresher and better preserved.

The main value in the collection comes from its relatively large size and the information it can throw upon the trading connections of Croft in the 12th to 14th centuries. It is possible that the incidence of 12th to early 13th-century wares in comparison to that of the later 13th- to 14th-century wares might provide some clue as to the topography of the village in these two periods, but since it is not clear whether the village actually lay in this area and was disturbed by later landscaping or whether wholesale movement of soil took place even this is doubtful. Nevertheless, there are at present few other comparable collections of pottery from northern Herefordshire and certainly none of similar size except for that from Wigmore Castle and the combined collection from various sites in Leominster.

For the later medieval, 16th and early 17th-centuries, the character of the pottery suggests that it all originated in the castle and gives a good sample of the pottery used during this period at a high status site. The late medieval pottery is almost completely dominated by Malvern Chase wares and this is consistent with other sites in the northern part of the county. The immediate source of this pottery was presumably the market at Leominster and the trade route probably ran from Hanley Castle, around or over the Malvern Hills, through Ledbury and Hereford and thence northwards to Leominster. The Cistercian wares are possibly contemporary with some of this pottery and likewise indicate supply from the south and east. There is a sudden change in the second half of the 16th century with the emergence of the Forest of Lingon potteries, which quickly supplanted Malvern Chase wares. The various non-local and imported wares noted are probably all contemporary with this north Herefordshire pottery. It is likely that they were not obtained through the local market system but direct from London or a south coast port. The only other example of the Italian marbled slipware known to the author from the county comes from Goodrich castle, a similar high status settlement, found in an unstratified collection probably consisting mainly of pottery used on the site in or just before the Civil War siege of the castle.

The medieval and early post-medieval pottery from Croft Castle should be published as a type series, based on fabric and form, in the manner of that from the city of Hereford. Sections can then be added on the stratified pottery and the correlation of the pottery sequence with the site history as revealed by the 2001-4 excavations.

Proposed work programme

The following work programme is designed to produce an archive catalogue of the medieval and early post-medieval pottery finds, and to produce a report suitable for academic publication (Table 1). It is based on the assumption that c.80% of the medieval and early post-medieval pottery from the site has been viewed and that this sample covers most of the variation in fabrics and forms.

The pottery would be studied in Lincoln and it is probably safest to collect and return the finds by car, door to door. No allowance for this is made in the costing and it is probably less expensive if this is carried out by a member of the Herefordshire Archaeology team. The pottery would then be recording using the standard AVAC procedures (based on the Medieval Pottery Research Group guidelines), producing an Access database which could be integrated with the rest of the Croft Castle digital archive (Task 1).

It is assumed that there between 4 and 5 North Herefordshire fabrics present at Croft which are not covered by the Hereford type fabric series and that samples of these would be examined in thin section.

The thin sections would be made at the Department of Earth Sciences, University of Manchester, and studied by Alan Vince (Task 2).

Thirty-three sherds were selected for illustration and allowance has been made for 3-4 extra sherds in the unexamined collection. The cost of illustration is calculated assuming that they will be drawn by the Network Archaeology drawing office, in Lincoln, where the process can be overseen and the illustrations checked against the sherds at the pencil drawing stage (Task 3).

A day has been set aside for the analysis of the pottery data collected in Task 1. It is assumed that only a small fraction of this pottery comes from contemporary deposits and that the main purpose of the analysis will be to test various models of taphonomy proposed for the site stratigraphic development by the site excavators. One will therefore be looking at sherd size, condition and the repeated association of different wares in the same contexts rather than simply providing a *terminus post quem* for the deposition of a layer (Task 4).

Finally, a report on the pottery will be prepared (Task 5). This report will both document the methodology used and describe the material found. It will include a synthetic section where the relationship of the Croft pottery to that found at other sites in North Herefordshire is explored and an agenda for future work on the medieval and early post-medieval pottery of North Herefordshire is set out.

Table 1

Task	Description	Estimated duration	Cost (2004/5 rates)
1	Archive recording of medieval and early post-medieval pottery	7 days (c.150 sherds per day)	£1260
2	Thin section analysis and description of North Herefordshire wares and non-local	1 day (plus 4-6 weeks lab time)	£337.5
3	Illustration of medieval and early post-medieval pottery	2 days	£500
4	Analysis of stratigraphic and area distribution	1 day	£180
5	Production of text	3 days	£540