

Assessment of the Clay Tobacco Pipes and Pottery from the 2004 Season's Excavations at Castle Sinclair Girnigoe, Caithness, Scotland

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A small collection of pottery and clay tobacco pipes was recovered from the second phase of evaluation carried out at Castle Sinclair Girnigoe by Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd in 2004. The finds range date from the medieval period or later to the 19th century but are mainly probably of mid/late 17th-century date.

Description

Clay Tobacco Pipes

Thirty-one fragments of clay tobacco pipe were recovered. Most are featureless stem fragments but the collection includes one bowl and two decorated stems.

The pipe fabric was examined at x20 magnification and is mainly fine-textured with some visible quartz silt, sparse muscovite flakes up to 0.1mm across are visible on the surface of the pipes. This pipeclay is probably obtained from a deposit of Tertiary Ball Clay, such as those of the Isle of Wight and Dorset. This clay was used extensively from pipe manufacture in southern and eastern England (and quite possibly also in the Low Countries).

The pipes occur with three bore diameters, characteristic of the early to mid 17th century, the later 17th century and the later 18th and 19th centuries respectively.

The early to mid 17th-century pipes include the single bowl, and the decorated stem fragments, as well as a cut mouthpiece. The bowl is milled with a plain knife-cut heel and probably dates to the period c.1640-60. It is similar in appearance to those produced in London. The decorated stems both have a single line of lozenge shaped stamps consisting of an elaborate fleur-de-lys in a diamond-shaped border. Such stamps were used in Amsterdam in the mid 17th century.

The later 17th-century pipes consist solely of stem fragments, all from one context (1114). They have a similar appearance at x20 magnification to the earlier pipes.

The later 18th- to 19th-century pipes consist of a red wax coated mouthpiece and featureless stems.

Pottery

Thirty-one fragments of pottery were recovered from the evaluation interventions. Most of these (28) were recovered from context 1100 and include several joining sherds. It is possible that all come from the same smashed vessel.

The fabric of this vessel contains numerous organic voids, abundant subangular quartz grains up to 1.0mm across together with sparse rounded polished grains. The groundmass is variegated and micaceous.

The polished quartz grains, in particular, are characteristic of lower Cretaceous clays and sands. Deposits of such strata are rare in Scotland but do outcrop along the east Caithness coast, from Wick southwards to Inverness and Elgin. Therefore, this vessel was probably locally produced.

The vessel has a flat base, curving body and a sloping shoulder with no sign of neck or rim sherds, nor of a handle. Several of the sherds were sooted on the exterior. The use of this chaff-tempered fabric is thought to have been introduced following Viking settlement and the tradition continues throughout the medieval period (REF).

Two sherds of 17th-century date were recovered. That from context 1104 is a thin-walled body sherd from a tin-glazed mug or drinking jug with an external purple-mottled tin glaze and an internal plain white tin glaze (TGW). The use of this mottled glaze began in Antwerp in the mid 16th century (so-called Malling jugs) but continued into the early to mid 17th century, for example at London.

That from context 1113 is a glazed red earthenware of Low Countries character(DUTR). The fabric at x20 magnification consists of a fine-textured red-firing groundmass with abundant rounded quartz sand inclusions, some of which are coated with haematite. This might suggest the use of a sand derived from a red sandstone, such as the Old Red Sandstone, which outcrops in eastern Scotland. The vessel might therefore be a local copy of a Low Countries vessel.

A single sherd of Creamware, of later 18th or 19th-century date. was recovered from context 1091.

Assessment

All of the finds are consistent with a 17th-century or later date but apart from the single pipe bowl, from context 1114 they cannot be closely dated. However, little of the material appears to date to the later part of the century.

It is unlikely that a profile can be reconstructed of the grass-tempered vessel from context 1100. However, it would be possible to test the postulated local source through thin section analysis. The decorated clay pipe stems and the clay pipe bowl could be illustrated.

Appendix 1

Context	class	Cname	Subfabric	Form	Part	Description	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Use
1091	POTTERY	CREA		PLATE	BS		1	1	7	
1035	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	BS	19TH C BORE DIAM	3	3	8	
1074	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	MOUTHPIECE	RED WAX;19TH C BORE DIAM	1	1	1	
1085	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	BS	17TH C BORE DIAM	2	2	4	
1100	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	BS	17TH C BORE DIAM	3	3	11	
1100	POTTERY	PREH	A SA Q <0.5MM; M ORGANICS;VARIAGATED GROUNDMASS;S GSQ <0.5MM	JAR	BS	FLAT BASE; CURVED BODY NO RIM OR NECK	28	1	166	SOOTED EXT
1104	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	BS	17TH C BORE DIAM	4	4	15	
1104	POTTERY	TGW	FINE QUARTZ IN CALC MATRIX	MUG/DJ	BS	PURPLE MOTTLED EXT;MALLING	1	1	3	
1113	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	BS	17TH C BORE DIAM;STEM STAMPS - FLEUR-DE-LYS IN DIAMOND BORDER	1	1	1	
1113	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	BS	17TH C BORE DIAM	1	1	5	
1113	POTTERY	DUTR	CLEAN MATRIX;A RQ SOME RED COATED	CAUL	BS	INT PLAIN GL;EXT HORIZ GROOVES/COMBING	1	1	2	
1114	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	BS	17TH C BORE DIAM	10	10	38	
1114	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	MOUTHPIECE	CUT MOUTHPIECE	1	1	3	
1114	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	BOWL	1640-60;HEELED BOWL;MILLED RIM	1	1	11	
1114	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	BS	L17TH BORE DIAM	3	3	7	
1114	CTP	PIPECLAY		PIPE	BS	17TH C BORE DIAM;STEM STAMPS - FLEUR-DE-LYS IN DIAMOND BORDER	1	1	3	

