

Medieval and post-medieval pottery from Sheffield Manor Costing and proposals for analysis

C.G. Cumberpatch BA PhD
Archaeological Consultant

Introduction

The pottery assemblage from the excavations at Sheffield Manor was inspected by the author in July 2002 with a view to drawing up a costed proposal for the production of a report on the material. The site has produced a large assemblage of pottery which is, at present, unquantified other than by the number of boxes. Seventeen boxes contained sorted pottery of various types, thirty boxes contained Manganese Mottled 'Manor wares', produced on the site while a further one hundred and twenty-two boxes contained pottery together with other classes of finds, including one containing Tin Glazed Earthenware tiles. The finds also include considerable quantities of saggar fragments and kiln furniture.

The size of the assemblage and the limited space available precluded a complete examination of the material, but with the assistance of the excavator, Ms. P. Beswick, it was possible to gain a good overall impression of the range of material and the possibilities that analysis might offer for extending and refining our knowledge of the later medieval, and particularly the post-medieval / early modern, pottery industry in the Sheffield area, both through the identification and characterisation of locally manufactured material and also through the association of this local material with dated imports, both regional and European.

The range of pottery present reflects the long occupation of the Manor site and includes medieval, post-medieval and recent material, with a particularly important group derived from the potters workshop which existed on the site in the early 18th century. Amongst the finds from the workshop is a Dutch oven dated 1715 and bearing the potters initials, IEF.

A particularly important aspect of the assemblage as a whole is that it spans periods of major change in the pottery industry, changes which reflect wider changes in social practices and attitudes (Cumberpatch in press).

The medieval pottery

The long occupation of the Manor site means that much of the medieval pottery was found within later features, although some stratified groups were identified. In general terms the medieval pottery of the Sheffield area is poorly known, the large collections from Beauchief Abbey having vanished sometime after excavation (Merrony pers. comm.) and the extant material from Sheffield Castle being rather late in date. It is unclear whether the inhabitants of medieval Sheffield obtained their pottery from the potteries in the Don Valley, from sources in Derbyshire or from presently unknown and undocumented potteries in the Sheffield area. It is clear from later activity that usable clay occurs within the Sheffield region, but at present the only definite evidence of production belongs to the early modern period. In consequence, while we have a reasonably good picture of the patterns of medieval pottery production and circulation in the Lower Don valley (Cumberpatch in prep. 1) and in north-east Derbyshire (Cumberpatch in prep. 2), Sheffield and its immediate region is an area that remains under-researched and poorly understood. The Manor assemblages are likely to make a significant contribution to our understanding of the wider situation through the identification of material from known potteries and the characterisation of hitherto unknown potteries. Ongoing work at Beauchief Abbey and Sheffield Castle (Davies and Willmott 2002) may eventually provide useful comparative data, but at present the groups from the Manor stand virtually alone as evidence for the character of the pottery industry and trade in the Sheffield area. A brief scan of the material showed that there were two boxes of medieval pottery and that much of this was recognisable as Coal Measures type ware, although how much of this was the product of the potteries in the Rotherham area and how much was from hitherto unidentified potteries remains to be determined. Imported wares appeared to be of a late date (in addition to post-medieval imported wares) and it is probable that a significant part of the medieval assemblage belongs to the later medieval period.

The post-medieval pottery

The post-medieval pottery assemblage (defined as dating to between c.1485 – 1700) from the Manor is of considerable size and significance. It includes material dating to the period when the Manor was visited by Wolsey and was, in part, occupied by Mary, Queen of Scots. Considerable building and rebuilding characterises this period of the site's history and significant deposits of pottery are associated with it. The brief examination of the assemblage showed that material has been sorted and grouped by types, although it has not been quantified. Cistercian ware, Blackware, Yellow wares were prominent amongst the group and totalled six boxes, with additional material boxed with the small finds. Coarsewares were also present in considerable quantities. Imported wares included Martincamp flasks and Rhenish stonewares.

To date, few attempts have been made to investigate the extent of distinctions in fabric between the different potteries producing Cistercian wares and Blackwares. As a result, while the typological characteristics of the wares are well documented (e.g. Moorhouse and Roberts 1992), the question of recognising the products of the various workshops remain uninvestigated. The same applies to the yellow ware industry which was, at some sites at least, closely linked with the production of Cistercian wares and Blackwares. It is suggested therefore, that in addition to a conventional typological study of the material, attention is paid to the distinctions between different fabrics represented on the site. A number of different fabrics were recognised amongst the assemblage of Cistercian wares and Blackwares from Pontefract Castle (Cumberpatch 2002), but no opportunity was available to assess the extent to which these represented the output of different potteries. The Manor assemblage, being of a significant size, offers the opportunity to undertake original research in this regard and to enhance significantly our understanding of the post-medieval pottery industry and the organisation of the circulation of pottery at this time. It may also allow an assessment of the extent to which typological differences relate to different potters and workshops or to changes over time within the same workshops. This would lay the groundwork for a later project to investigate the petrological and chemical distinctions between the various fabrics, using appropriate analytical techniques.

If there remain significant questions regarding the post-medieval tablewares, this is true to an even greater extent when it comes to the coarseware component. Although Midlands Purple wares, Brown and Yellow Glazed Coarsewares, Redwares etc are well known and recognised types, the details of variation between different potteries and over time is rather poorly understood. On the basis of the evidence from both Pontefract Castle and Church Street, Bawtry (Cumberpatch 1996), it is clear that distinctions within the ware classes on the basis of both form and fabric can be identified with comparative ease. The question of the significance of these distinctions remains to be determined and it appears that the Manor assemblage could prove a useful source of data pertinent to these questions. The analysis of the material thus offers the opportunity to contribute to both an understanding of the site itself and also to the wider regional picture, at least in terms of the ceramics.

The early modern pottery assemblage

The early modern pottery assemblage, (defined as dating to between c.1700 and 1750) covers a period during which the Manor ceased to be a manor (1708) and was transformed into a series of domestic dwellings. These had a variety of functions and part of the site was occupied by a potter, John Fox. The Dutch oven bearing Fox's initial carries a date of 1715. The products of Fox's pottery have been identified on a number of sites in the region, notably The Peacock Inn, Chesterfield (Beswick 1978) where they are briefly described;

Products typical of the Manor kiln are tankards with ribbed and corrugated decoration, porringers, possets, chamber pots, dishes and plates which seem to be a manor speciality. The fabric is evenly fired and is usually pale cream or pink in colour. It is noteworthy both for its relative fineness, grit filler being almost absent, and for its thin body. The basic yellow-to-brown colour of the lead glaze was enriched by the addition of manganese which produced streaks of dark purple-brown (Beswick 1978:47).

The pottery assemblage from the Manor includes a large quantity of wasters from the kiln, together with saggars and kiln furniture. These provide an excellent record of the range of wares manufactured on the site, together with insights into the technology employed by Fox. Parallels and antecedents for the pottery are unknown and research orientated towards finding these might form part of the report on the material from the site. A report on certain aspects of the technology employed exists in the site archive (Beswick pers. comm.).

Potteries producing manganese mottled wares of this date are, nationally, rare and other local 18th century potteries appear to be both somewhat later in date and concerned primarily with the manufacture of slipwares and utilitarian coarsewares. Those for which there is archaeological evidence are listed in Table 1. Other sites, known primarily from the documentary record, have been discussed by Lawrence (1974).

Site	Date range	Products	Reference
Sheffield Manor	Post 1708 – post 1715	Manganese Mottled wares	Beswick, pers. comm., 1978
Midhope / Midhopestones	1720 – c. 1845	Slipware, Brown Glazed Coarsewares, Redware	Lawrence 1974, Ashurst 1987
Swinton	1745 - 68	Slipwares; flatware, hollow ware	Cox and Cox 2001
Silkstone	1754 - 1802	Slipwares, Brown Glazed Coarsewares	Lawrence 1974
Bolsterstone	c. 1778 – 1796	Slipware, Black Glazed Coarsewares	Ashurst 1987

Table 1. Archaeologically attested 18th century potteries in South Yorkshire

It is suggested that the analysis and publication of the pottery assemblage associated with Fox's pottery is of regional, and possibly national, significance and should therefore be accorded a central place in any scheme of research based upon the excavations at the Manor. At the same time, assemblages associated with other dwellings on the site are of significance as representing the range of wares, utilitarian as well as table wares, in use in domestic contexts in the earlier part of the 18th century. This was a period during which the pottery industry underwent a profound change with the introduction of the industrial scale production of tablewares, alongside the continuing tradition of utilitarian wares produced in 'country potteries'.

The recent pottery assemblage

The recent pottery assemblage, covering the period 1750 to the present day, is, strictly speaking, outside the scope of this costing. It is mentioned here because it represents an assemblage from domestic contexts which may serve as an important comparative collection to set against the assemblages from recently excavated industrial sites in Sheffield (Lines in prep., O'Neill pers. comm.). The material recovered from these sites includes groups deposited as part of the levelling processes which took place on the site prior to building and rebuilding as well as material in use on the site. While important for our understanding of the processes of site formation and the dating of the various phases of activity, the nature of these groups means that they are somewhat less valuable in the context of advancing our understanding of the circulation, consumption and use of pottery in the recent period. In contrast, the Manor assemblage offers the opportunity to analyse and interpret an assemblage of significant size from domestic contexts.

Recent excavations at the Top Pottery, Rawmarsh (Cumberpatch in prep. 3) and the Denaby Pottery, Conisbrough (Cumberpatch 2001) have produced large assemblages of a variety of later 18th and 19th century types, including Mocha ware, Banded wares, Transfer Printed wares and Sponge decorated wares. Amongst these are examples of rare and hitherto undocumented types of decoration. Similarly, excavations at Sheffield Riverside have produced rare examples of makers stamps and transfer printed marks (Oliver pers. comm.). It is clear that archaeological data can make a significant contribution to our knowledge and understanding of the 18th and 19th century pottery industry by locating, identifying and publishing material that is derived from unique situations which have not hitherto contributed to the body of material studied by specialists in pottery of this date. For these reasons, it would be highly desirable if the Manor assemblages could be studied as part of the wider

project. A costing is included below, but is presented separately from the costing for the remainder of the assemblage as it remains an 'optional' component of the project.

Bibliography

- Ashurst, D. 1987 *Excavations at the 17th – 18th century Glasshouse at Bolsterstone and the 18th century Bolsterstone Pothouse, Stocksbridge, Yorkshire*. *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 21;147-226.
- Beswick, P. 1978 *The Sheffield Manor products from the Peacock Inn* In: P. Borne, T. Courtney and P. Dixon *The Peacock Inn, Chesterfield*. *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* 98; 47.
- Cox, A and Cox A. 2001 *Rockingham 1745 – 1842* Antique Collectors Club.
- Cumberpatch, C.G. 1996 *The medieval and post-medieval pottery* In: J.A. Dunkley and C.G. Cumberpatch (Eds.) *Excavations at 16 – 20 Church Street, Bawtry* British Archaeological Reports British Series 248.
- Cumberpatch, C.G. 2001 *Pottery from the Denaby Pottery, Conisbrough, South Yorkshire*. Unpublished archive report for the University of Manchester Archaeology Unit.
- Cumberpatch, C.G. 2002 *The pottery* In: I. Roberts (Ed.) *Pontefract Castle: Archaeological Excavations 1982-86*. *Yorkshire Archaeology* 8. West Yorkshire Archaeology Service / English Heritage.
- Cumberpatch, C.G. in prep. 1 *Archaeological evidence for medieval and later pottery production in and around Rawmarsh, Rotherham, South Yorkshire*.
- Cumberpatch, C.G. in prep. 2 *Medieval pottery in Derbyshire: A review*.
- Cumberpatch, C.G. in prep. 3 *Later 18th and 19th century pottery from the site of the Top Pottery Rawmarsh*. Unpublished archive report for ARCUS / University of Sheffield.
- Cumberpatch, C.G. in press *The transformation of tradition; the origins of the post-medieval ceramic tradition in Europe* *Assemblage*.
- Davies, G. and Willmott, H. 2002 *Excavation and research at Sheffield Castle; an assessment and project design*. ARCUS / University of Sheffield.
- Lawrence, H. 1974 *Yorkshire pots and potteries* David and Charles.
- Moorhouse, S. and Roberts, I. 1992 *Wrenthorpe Potteries* *Yorkshire Archaeology* 2. West Yorkshire Archaeology Service.