

Medieval Ceramics
Notes

Post-medieval North Devon-type wares from the Isle of Man

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Background

From the 11th to the 13th centuries the Isle of Man, as capital of the Kingdom of the Isles, provided a forward base within the Irish Sea able to project Scandinavian power and economic interest south towards England, Ireland and the continent. Therefore, it is not surprising that insular ceramic assemblages of this period regularly show that around 25% of all finds derived from France and Spain (Davey 2013). In addition,

between 30%–50% of the pottery is British in origin. Although the main identified sources are Cheshire, Lancashire and Cumbria, there is nevertheless a significant southern bias, with Peel Castle providing quantities of Bristol wares and a range of Somerset products identified by Mike Ponsford (Davey 2002). These proportions remain virtually unchanged during the later Middle Ages (Davey 2011).

With the acquisition of the island in 1405 by the Stanley family of south Lancashire, it might

Table 1. Summary of north Devon pottery from the Isle of Man

Peel Castle	GTW	NDGF	SLP	SGW	Total	MVs
Old Castle Museum		1 (1)		1 (1)	2	2
Cowley Collection	3 (2)	5 (4)			8	6
1982–87 excavations	35 (6)	67(15)	1 (1)	1 (1)	104	23
Peel Town						
IRIS excavations 2000	1 (1)				1	1
Castletown excavations						
Castle Rushen Stores 1991–92	39 (13)	7 (7)	1 (1)	2 (2)	49	23
Old Grammar School 1960–61	4 (3)				4	3
Stray find 2001	1 (1)				1	1
Rushen Abbey						
Excavations 1998–2008	18 (11)	3 (3)			21	14
Cooil Shelagh, Andreas						
Stray find 1987	1 (1)				1	1
Ballaugh						
Stray find 2006	1 (1)				1	1
Maughold						
Stray finds 2015	1 (1)	1 (1)			2	2
TOTAL	104	84	2	4	194	77

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be imagined that this situation would change. But the 1540 Dissolution deposits from Rushen Abbey, whilst containing an important element derived from potteries on their English lands, nevertheless maintained a continental element of around 25%. No north Devon-type products dating to this period have been identified, however during the following century Gravel-tempered ware (GTW), Granite-free ware (GFW), slipware (SLP), including sgraffito decorated examples (SGW), make their appearance.

The north Devon ware finds

As shown in Table 1, a total of 194 sherds of post-medieval north Devon pottery, representing a minimum of 77 vessels (MV), have been recovered from seven sites on the Isle of Man.

The first finds, from rabbit scrapes at Peel Castle, were made over 100 years ago, though they were not recognised until the 1990s. One is an unusually small sgraffito dish (Manx Museum Accession Number MM 76-7A) found in 1898 the other the base of a North Devon Gravel-free ware vessel (MM 76-7F/1) recovered in 1908 (Fig 1). Eight sherds from at least six vessels were retained in the Cowley Collection from Peel castle (Curphey 1980-82, 78-9) and excavations in the 1980s of a short-lived re-fortification during the English Civil War, between 1644 and 1651 (Curphey 1980-82, 78-9), produced over 100 sherds, from at

least 23 vessels, including Merida, late Saintonge and northern French wares. At the time it was considered unwise to extrapolate from this evidence as the deposits represented an imposed garrison whose material culture might well not reflect that of the rest of the island.

Excavation in the Old Grammar School at Castletown in the 1960s found four sherds from at least three vessels (Cubbon 1971) and exploration within the town itself in the 1990s (Davey and Johnson 1996) and again in 2007 (unfortunately never brought to publication) also produced a good range of North Devon-type products from 17th and early 18th century garden deposits, thus indicating that these wares were circulating at least in the emerging towns. In 2000 a single sherd was recovered from excavations in Peel at some distance from the castle.

More recently, as a result of improved relations between Manx National Heritage and the metal detecting community, groups of medieval and post-medieval sherds have been presented to the museum from a number of rural locations. These include small numbers of north Devon-type products from Andreas, Ballaugh and Maughold. Given the absence of medieval villages or DMVs, these finds are significant in that they must derive from night soil disbursed by the farms on which they have been located. If the 21 sherds and 14 vessels recovered from post-Dissolution deposits at Rushen Abbey are included – the site was



Figure 1. Early north Devon finds from Peel Castle. Image; Author

occupied by a 'normal' Manx quarterland farm after 1540 – then north Devon wares must be considered to have been in use throughout the island at least during the 17th century (Davey 1999, 56; Table 1).

Discussion

Evidence for the activities of north Devon merchants on the Isle of Man is provided from the late 16th century by the Ingates (duties paid on imported goods) customs records, Peel and Castletown being the major ports of entry. For example, in May 1594 William Shapley of Barnstaple landed a quantity of white soap (Dickinson 1997, 284). Although there has been no systematic research carried out into the movement of ceramics into the island, earthenware imports are regularly recorded, such as the two cart loads of mugs and the single 'Creedles (*sic*) of Cupes imported by John Ottiwell of Castletown in 1667 which are most likely to refer to pottery (Dickson 1997, 284). Pottery was almost certainly included in the 17th century trade recorded from North Devon to Peel, Douglas and Ramsey in the Isle of Man. It forms part of a regional pattern including all coastal Wales, Ireland and north-west England, and extending as far north as the Clyde (Grant 2005, 125-7).

The quantity of north Devon wares from the Isle of Man appears to be proportionally much greater than, for example, equivalent finds from Chester or North Wales (Rutter and Davey 1977, 19–21) or from individual production centres in northern and western France (Davey 2011). Their recent discovery in a number of rural locations suggests that, for a period at least, the North Devon potters were able to compete successfully against their rivals in north-west England and North Wales across a wide socio-economic spectrum.

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