

# A ceramic view of post-medieval markets and mariners in south Wales and the Bristol Channel

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*This paper (delivered at the MPRG 2016 conference in Taunton) examines pottery supply and consumption in post-medieval south Wales. It focusses specifically on south Glamorgan and the site of Cosmeston, which provides an important stratified assemblage and can be used as a type site from which to demonstrate ceramic use and traditions in the early post-medieval period in south Wales. After reviewing the history of post-medieval pottery studies in the region the paper discusses post-medieval pottery from two deposits at Cosmeston within the broader context of the economic and social networks of the Bristol Channel.*

## Introduction

The social and economic connections between the two sides of the Bristol Channel are widely recognised as significant and ancient, long enabling the movement of people and ideas. Social and economic relationships between north Somerset/Devon and south Wales in the post-medieval period have been the focus of much research (Sacks 1991; Taylor 2009; Stone 2012), with particular emphasis on information gleaned from 16th- and 17th-century port books (Rees 1954; Dimmock 2005). The archaeological evidence for post-medieval cross-channel activity has, however, received less attention, with clay pipes being the most studied artefact type (Price *et al* 1980).

This paper examines the ceramic evidence from south Wales, and in particular the modern county of Glamorgan, which runs from Cardiff in the east to Swansea in the west (Fig 1), through a discussion of post-medieval pottery recovered from excavations at Cosmeston. Glamorgan has its foundations within medieval regional structures as it was the area overseen by the Lord of Glamorgan, whose seat was at Cardiff Castle (Smith 1971). The region is recognised as geographically distinct: an area of lowland bordered by the coast (Bristol Channel) which rises up to the beginnings of the uplands (Valley heads) regionally known as the Bro (Vale of Glamorgan) and Blaenau (the Upland or Valleys) (Randall 1928; Freeman 1936). The Bro, the area under consideration here, had a strong connection to the Bristol Channel and consequently to the south-west of England, and it is

the specific coastal links between the two areas that have influenced the nature of English post-medieval ceramics found on sites in this area.

## Bristol Channel trade

South Glamorgan is on the periphery of the River Severn market system and its main connections are with north Somerset and Devon. Somerset wares dominate the assemblages from Glamorgan and in particular it is the products of the west Somerset kilns that appear most prevalent, rather than the southern Donyatt ceramics (see Coleman-Smith and Pearson 1988 for these products).

The increased commercialisation of the early post-medieval period as described by David Gaimster (2003) is certainly evidenced in this region by the increased use of ceramic material in southern Welsh households. However, unless identified as high status, post-medieval ceramic assemblages have not received much attention in this area and this has caused problems such as the misidentification and misinterpretation of material, to the detriment of our understanding of post-medieval society and economy in Glamorgan.

In order to address the situation, this paper examines two groups of ceramics from excavations at the medieval and post-medieval site Cosmeston, in south Glamorgan, to demonstrate the importance of the post-medieval west Somerset potteries to the region.

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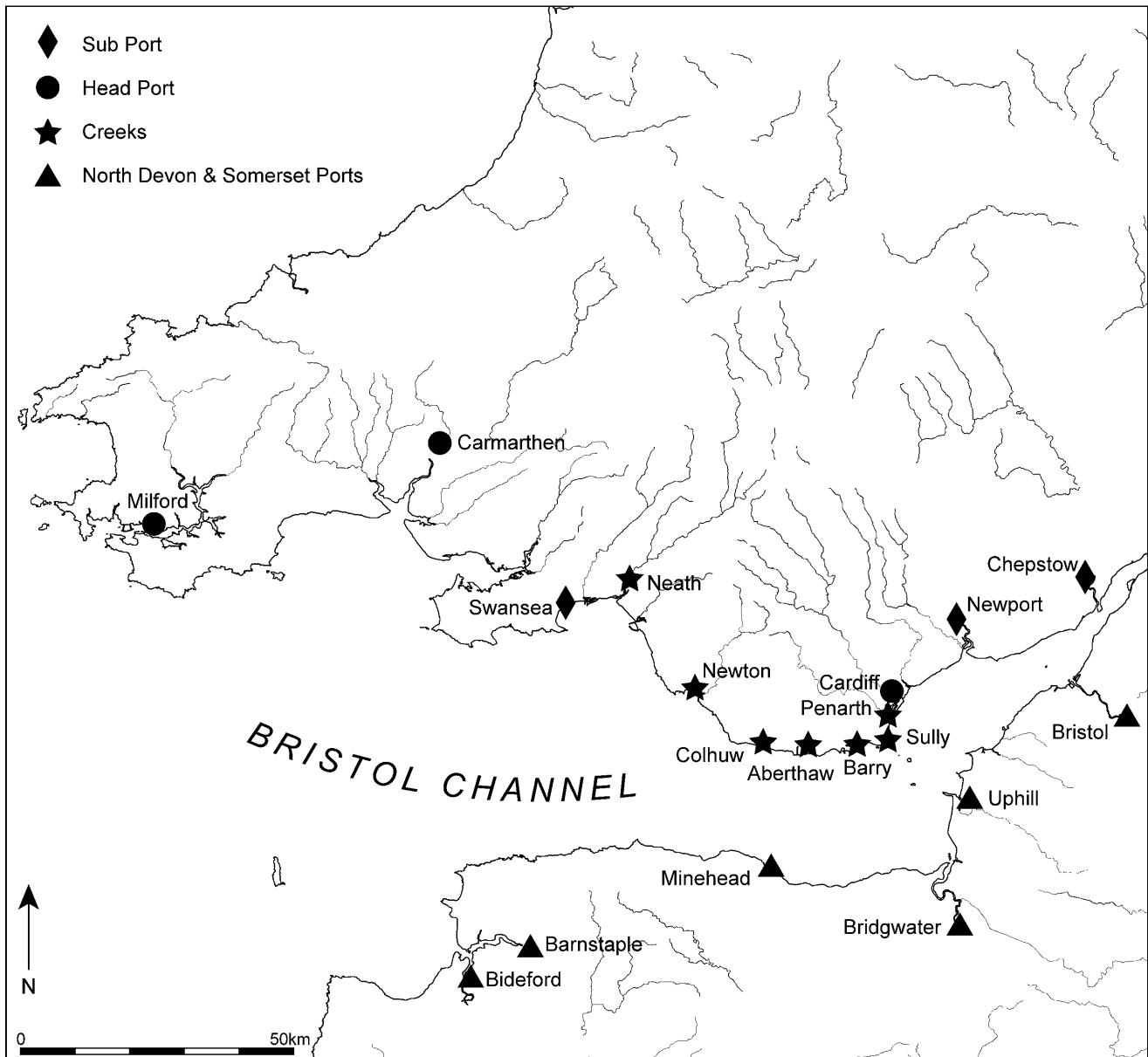


Figure 1. The location of ports and landing places along the Bristol channel.  
Image: Kirsty Harding.

### Trading places

The formalisation of the port system in the 16th century enabled a certain level of control over the movement of goods through the Welsh ports (Williams 1955); Cardiff was made the head port for Glamorgan, with sub-ports at Sully, Barry, Aberthaw and Newton (Lewis 1927) (Fig 1). During this time many of the large ships trading in the Bristol Channel used the ports at Chepstow and Carmarthen to avoid the heavy taxes imposed on goods, particularly wine, at the Bristol Port and the creation of the head ports was an attempt to harness greater control of this trade (Dimmock 2005).

Understanding the mechanisms by which people in south Wales traded locally within the Bristol Channel region is essential to understanding the ceramic

assemblages from sites in this area. Pertinent to this are the smaller sub-ports and the goods that were likely to have moved between these places.

The port books highlight two well established local routes: Aberthaw to Minehead, and Sully to Uphill (Williams 1960). The Sully to Uphill route appears to have received fewer large ships, an indication that the smaller landing places were acting as points on local routes rather than as the first point of call for the large long distance traders. This is supported by the documented vessel capacities: ships carrying only up to 20 tonnes were landing at Sully, whereas vessels with cargoes of up to 30 tonnes were docking at Aberthaw (Williams 1960)

The port books also provide important evidence for the range of goods being locally transported and the formal networks which existed, but there are

limitations, discussed in full elsewhere (Hussey 2001, 6–16). For example, the port records for trade between Uphill and Sully include items such as wool, butter and livestock (Williams 1960), but for small boats the imposition of port taxes does not appear to have been regular and therefore the scale of this localised trade is not accurately reflected within the historical records. The archaeological evidence therefore enhances this picture and provides alternatives to the historically attested perspective of trade in the Bristol Channel.

### Post-medieval pottery in south Wales: The history of study

One issue which has inhibited the study of post-medieval pottery in south Wales has been the relative lack of evidence for the local production of ceramics, particularly in the earlier part of this period (late 15th to early 17th centuries). Most relevant to south Glamorgan is the confusion as to the origins of the Ewenny pottery industry. The first archaeological study of post-medieval pottery in Wales (Talbot 1968) included the Ewenny potteries, a thriving 18th- and 19th-century group of kilns, within the list of historically documented kiln sites. Due to their success in the 19th century it has been assumed that the foundation of these kilns was significantly earlier. The issue of misinterpretation has been influenced by Iolo Morgannwg, a self-professed Welsh bard and historian writing in the late 18th and early 19th century, who referred to the Ewenny kilns as historical and associated them with pottery production in south Wales from the Roman period (Talbot 1968, 135). In addition to this, the clay at Ewenny was recognised as being one of the only sources of good brickearth in the Vale of Glamorgan and this is further substantiated by 15th-century documentary references to land called ‘Potters land’ being granted by Lord Stradling to a tenant in the Merthyr Mawr area (Talbot 1968, 136). However, whilst this reference might suggest clay extraction, archaeological work in this area over the last 10 years has yet to reveal any direct evidence for pottery production pre-dating the 18th century. As a consequence of the repeatedly suggested early date for the Ewenny industry it has been assumed that many of the redwares found on excavations in south Glamorgan are local and likely to be Ewenny ceramics. This in turn has skewed the way in which post-medieval pottery is used in the analysis and dating of sites in south Wales.

A general survey of medieval and post-medieval ceramics in Wales (Papazian and Campbell 1992) failed to more than simply characterise post-medieval pottery in south Glamorgan (Campbell 1993, 2). The survey provided an update on post-medieval ceramic studies in Wales, highlighting a number of areas where knowledge was particularly lacking. The primary reason given for the limited development was the lack of stratified assemblages of 15th–16th century date.

It is however apparent that there were a number of 16th century assemblages from excavations which would have provided this information; Orchard Castle (1964–66; Beaudette *et al* 1981), three sites in Cardiff at Womanby Street (1972; Webster and Webster 1974), Quay Street (1973–74; Webster 1977) and Working Street (Webster 1978), St Fagans (1978–1980; unpublished), Cowbridge (1983–87; Parkhouse and Evans 1996), Gladlys Farm, excavated 1991 (Newman 1996), and Cosmeston (1979–1988 Newman and Parkhouse 1983; Forward 2013; Forward and Hines 2016). Whilst these assemblages were available at the time of the survey identification of the ceramics was incorrect and in general, despite the presence of these sites, it was considered that there was ‘little evidence of any other possible transitional ware’ (Campbell 1993, 5). As a consequence of overlooking these groups and the belief that this material was later in date, a general lack of understanding and accurate identification of specifically the Somerset wares meant that the ‘grey area’ of knowledge (Campbell 1993, 3) for particularly the 16th century was compounded.

In contrast to the limited work on early post-medieval Welsh and English everyday ceramics, continental imports found on sites in south Wales have received greater attention (Lewis and Evans 1982; Evans 1987; James and James 1987; O’Mahoney 1995; Wrathmell *et al* 2016).

It is clear from the number of imported vessels from sites on the coast that these communities had access to markets where Spanish and Portuguese ceramics were particularly readily available due to direct trading links (James and James 1983), as well as French, Italian and German ceramics through indirect trade via the port at Bristol which appear in smaller quantities. The assemblage from Cosmeston, as well as recently excavated groups from sites at Cardiff Castle (Forward 2014), Groes Farm, Marshfield (Forward 2015) and Newport (Jarrett forthcoming), provide good examples of this. The imports provide further evidence to indicate the breadth of local trade not necessarily recorded within the port books. The archaeological evidence can supplement this and develop our understanding of the scale of the economic and social movement between south Wales and the West Country in the 16th and 17th centuries.

### River Severn trade

Trading regions and networks demonstrate clear economic communities in this area, and work by Alan Vince (1983; 1985) and Steve Clarke (Clarke and Bray 2003; Clarke *et al* 1985) on ceramics in Monmouthshire and Gwent shows different patterns of post-medieval pottery use to elsewhere in south Wales. For example, unlike Glamorgan, Monmouthshire has a history of ceramic production and work has focused on the production centres that surrounded and supplied Monmouth in the post-

medieval period (Clarke *et al* 1985). Post-medieval wasters and kilns have been found at eight sites (Fig 2) in Monmouthshire, as well as others close by over the border in Herefordshire. The River Severn was a busy waterway with a dock still active at Gloucester in the early 20th century and this would explain the similarities between the pottery found in Hereford, Gloucester and Monmouth, particularly in the post-medieval period. In Gwent, by contrast, Malvernian wares dominate assemblages from the 14th–17th centuries, whilst the Somerset wares that characterise the Glamorgan assemblages, are subsidiary to those ceramics which were traded around the River Severn (Wrathmell 2016; Jarrett forthcoming). The ceramic history of the Severn Valley, therefore, is different from that identified for Glamorgan.

### The ceramic assemblage from Cosmeston

Cosmeston is a medieval manor and post-medieval settlement in south Glamorgan, located 5.5 miles from Cardiff, 2.5 miles from the sub-port at Sully, and one mile from the Bristol Channel. The site was first investigated in 1979 and was subsequently excavated under the Manpower Services scheme by the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust (GGAT). The excavations by GGAT ran from 1982 to 1987 (Newman and Parkhouse 1983) and a further scheme of work was carried out by Wessex Archaeology in 1993 (Andrews 1996). In 2007 Cardiff University began a 4-year programme of summer excavations run as training for student fieldwork to investigate the area of the site which appears on the first edition OS map as ‘the Castle’ (Forward and Hines 2016).

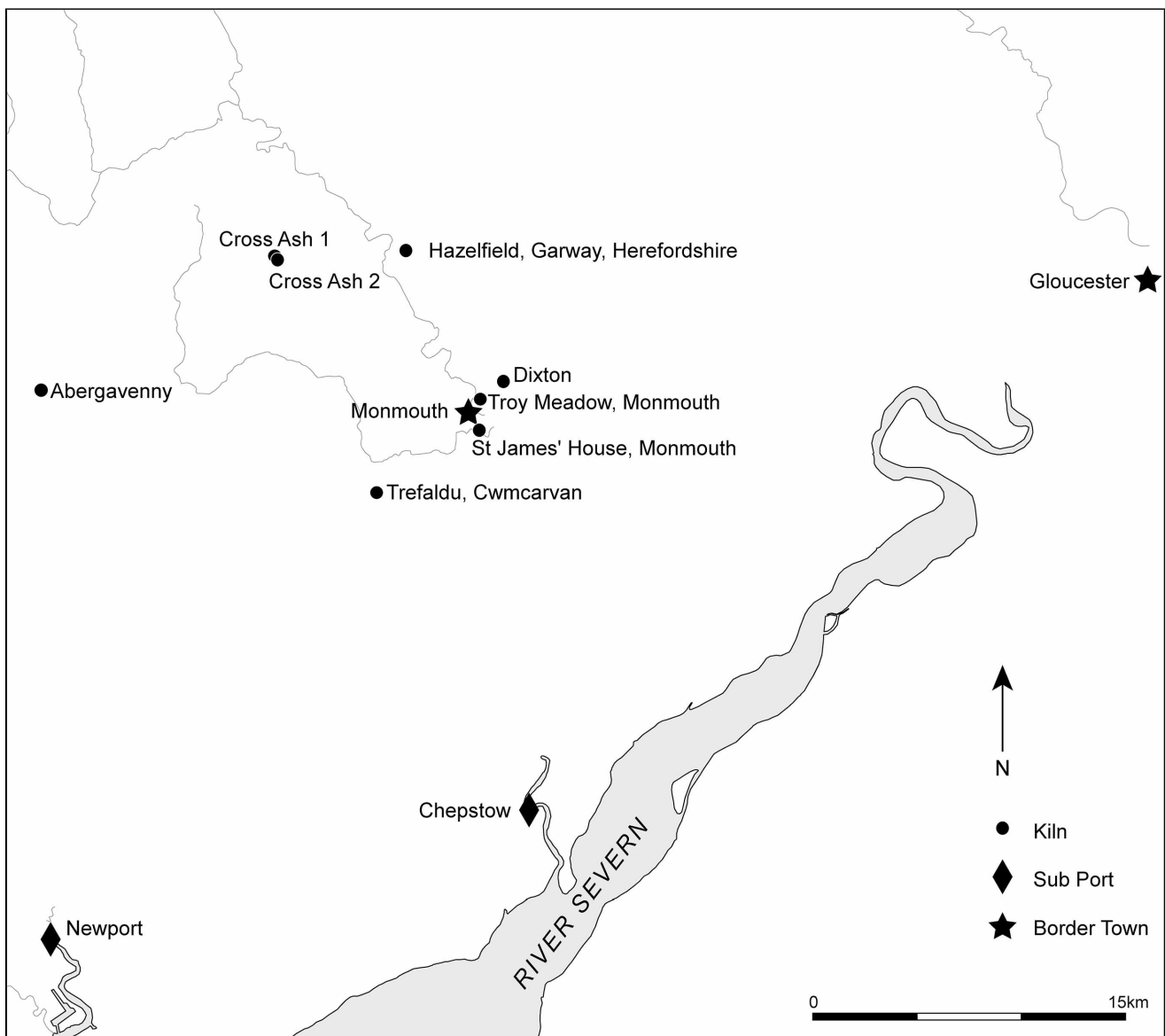


Figure 2. The location of post-medieval pottery production sites in Gwent. Image: Kirsty Harding.

**Table 1.** Summary of the range of fabrics within the midden and yard surface at Cosmeston (CFS stands for Cosmeston Fabric Series).

Fabric name	Description	Date
<i>Local medieval wares</i>		
CFS14 – Vale ware	Locally-produced south Glamorgan wares were initially identified and defined by Vyner (1982). Typically oxidised sherds, colour ranges from brown to orange. Common quartz (0.25mm-1mm), black iron oxides and sandstone (0.25mm-1.5mm) and occasional chert (0.25mm-1.25mm). More recently, petrographic analysis has demonstrated the variability within this fabric type although the ware has over-arching technological and decorative traits which identify this ware type as being from/characteristic of south Glamorgan. This fabric code differentiates the unglazed jars and incurved dishes from the jugs (below), (Forward 2013).	1250–1400
CFS17 – Vale ware jugs	Locally-produced jug fabric, different in terms of quantity in mineral inclusions and firing (Forward 2013, 97) Sherds typically have an oxidised internal surface ranging in colour from pink to orange and a grey reduced core and under the external surface glaze. The density of inclusions within the jug fabrics is normally less than within the jars.	1250–1400
CFS19 – Early local ware	A quartz-tempered fabric, The key mineral inclusions are the same as in CFS14 (Vale ware) but coarser in texture, comprising: Common quartz (0.25mm-1mm), black iron oxides and sandstone (0.25mm-1.5mm) and occasional chert (0.25mm-1.25mm). Mainly found in earlier contexts at the site and therefore considered an early version of Vale ware (Forward 2013, 124).	1100–1250
<i>Medieval regional imports</i>		
CFS13 – Ham Green ware	Ham Green ware has been extensively discussed as the primary fabric made at Pill on the River Avon (Barton 1963; Ponsford 1991). The kilns here supplied Bristol and the wider region and this included south Wales and Ireland (Ponsford 1990; McCutcheon 2006).	1150–1275
CFS27 – Bristol Redcliff ware	This white-firing ware is distinct from Ham Green ware jugs and is characterised inclusions of Redcliff sandstone, which outcrops in the Redcliff area of Bristol. The ware was initially identified in 1972 following excavations at St Peter’s Churchyard (Ponsford and Price 1979; Dawson and Ponsford, this volume).	1250–1400
<i>Medieval European imports</i>		
CFS24 – Saintonge ware	A very fine whiteware fabric found predominantly in coastal regions of England and Wales (mainly jugs) (Brown 2002, 29).	1250–1350
CFS26 – Unassigned French	White bodied, quartz fabric – cannot be assigned to a particular region or kiln.	
<i>Post-medieval regional imports</i>		
CFS31 – Somerset West	Fabrics associated with the Nether Stowey and Wrangway kilns (Pearson <i>et al</i> 2014). There are variations in the Somerset West category as identified by Dawson this volume). These fabrics are described as: ‘usually hard-fired with a granular break and characteristically flecked with abundant particles of quartz <0.5mm, even more abundant and > 1mm in the coarser wares from Wrangway. Hence the proportion of matrix to inclusions is typically 99:1 but falls to 89:11 in the Wrangway material. The matrix consists of 55-70 volume % of Fe-Al-K silicates with 10-20 % quartz. Glazes vary from oxidised light brown speckled with darker brown particles though reduced rich green to black speckled with white’ (Dawson <i>et al</i> , this volume).	1550–1680



CFS32 – Somerset East	This fabric is associated with the Wanstrow kilns. It is ‘hard fired, often with a grey core clean sandy appearance often laminar in structure and with occasional irregular fragments of quartz and ferruginous particles <2mm. Analysis shows that the matrix is typically 90-95% by volume and inclusions 10-5% and of the inclusions quartz predominates (70-80%). Glazes are hard, usually olive green speckled with black, occasionally displaying patches of oxidised brown’ (Dawson <i>et al</i> , this volume)	1500–1800
CFS33 – Somerset South	The body of this ware is often soft to medium fired, straw to orange in colour and has distinct soft iron-rich nodules <3mm. The body typically consists of 99% matrix and only 1% inclusions and about 30% of the matrix is kaolinite (figure 1). Plain lead glazes can be either oxidised brown or reduced green, sometimes when over white slip enriched with splashes of green from brass filings. The fit of the glaze over the white slip is often poor, resulting in flaking’ (Dawson <i>et al</i> , this volume)	1550–1700
CFS28 – Malvern Chase ware	Highly-fired red fabric with rounded quartz from 0.1mm-0.7mm and igneous rock and sandstone fragments of the same size; the larger igneous inclusions, however, can be up to 4.0mm (Vince 1985, 48–52).	1400–1700
CFS52 – Falfield ware	Mainly cup forms with a dark brown or purple glaze, not necessarily imitating Cistercian wares but certainly in the same tradition. Wasters discovered during excavations along the route of the M5 in 1973 were dated to the mid to late 17th century (Fowler and Bennett 1974).	1650–1700
CFS43 – North Devon gravel-tempered ware (NDGT)	This ware is described by Taylor (2007, 177) as containing: ‘Quartz: colourless to translucent or transparent, angular to sub-rounded, some abraded, some rounded smooth, 0.1-3.5mm. Feldspar: white and translucent, angular and sub-angular, some cleaved grains, 0.2-2.0mm. Biotite: rare brown cleavage flakes 0.2-1.5mm. Rock fragments: black rounded chert grain 1.2mm; a few fine-grained brown, grey and buff sandstones, rounded and sub-rounded, mainly 3-5mm; a few hard slate fragments, 0.2mm’	1650–1800
CFS44 – North Devon gravel-free ware (NDGF)	The body of the ware is described by Taylor (2007, 177) as consisting of ‘a smooth and almost clean clay with as little as 1% temper consisting of sparse quartz and fine mica’	1650–1800
CFS45 – North Devon sgraffito ware (NDSgraffito)	Sgraffito-decorated sherds are generally gravel-free. They have been separated from the gravel-free and gravel-tempered wares as production at the Stella Maris site, Bideford, is particularly distinctive (Allan 2005).	1650–1750
CFS64 – North Devon Calcareous (NDCal)	This fabric is gravel free with the addition of fine calcareous filler (?crushed shell) (Allan 1984, 148)	1475–1550
CFS62 – Early North Devon gravel-tempered ware (NDGTearly)	This fabric is as coarse as the classic gravel-tempered ware, but the inclusions are more rounded. It has only recently been the subject of detailed examination following the discovery and excavation of its production centre at Exeter Inn, Barnstaple and is described by Wood (2017) as: ‘Inclusion density: 5%. Fine micromass of pure clay with rare fine quartz inclusions, poorly sorted. Altered feldspars, common: Microcline perthite and Plagioclase, angular (rounded in rock) 1mm>. Quartz, scatter, angular, 1mm. Rock fragments igneous, scatter, composed of Quartz, Altered feldspars and Biotite, angular, 2mm. Sandstone (red), scatter, fine quartz bonded with dark iron rich cement, rounded, 1mm generally uniform in size. Calcareous voids, rare, result of material burning out during firing, well-rounded, circular in shape, >1mm. Siltstone (red), rare, banded iron rich, well-rounded, 1mm. Chert, rare (3 pieces), sub-angular with conchoidal fracture, 1mm’.	1500–1600
<b>Bristol 18th-century wares</b>		
CFS53 – Bristol tin-glazed ware	White body with tin glaze – decoration looks sponged and comes in a variety of colours from blue through to yellow.	1660–1750
CFS54 – Treacle-glazed ware	Brown tiger- or treacle-glazed tankards made in a white-firing clay (Allan 1982; Ponsford 1992).	1690–1740

CFS55 – Bristol yellow ware	White-firing body, yellow glazed with brown trailed and spot decoration; forms and decoration very similar to the Staffordshire pinky firing products (Barton 1961).	1680–1750
<i>Post-medieval European imports</i>		
CFS25 – Later Saintonge ware	This fabric is essentially the same as the medieval ware (see above), but forms comprise large pitchers (pégaux), chafing dishes and costrels (Hurst <i>et al</i> 1986, 76–99; Brown 2002, 31).	1450–1650
CFS51 – Portuguese redware	Portuguese redwares have been the subject of petrographic analysis, identifying the variables between the production centres of Lisbon, Aveiro (Newstead 2014) and Estremoz (Newstead and Casimiro 2017).	1500–1700
CFS57 – Raeren stoneware (Germany)	A dark grey stoneware. Initially vessels are decorated with a glossy grey glaze but in the second half of the 16th century they are more typically dark brown in colour, with blue being used from 1582 (Hurst <i>et al</i> 1986, 194–208).	1500–1600
CFS58 – Frechen stoneware (Germany)	Dark grey stoneware with a mottled brown ‘Tiger’ salt glaze (Hurst <i>et al</i> 1986, 214–21).	1550–1650
CFS63 – Berrettino (Liguria, Italy)	Fine buff ware, with internal blue tin glaze inside and out; painted decoration in darker blue on the internal surface and intersecting arcs on the back. Forms mainly comprise dishes and bowls (Hurst <i>et al</i> 1986, 26–30; Allan 2017, 123).	1500–1600
CFS35 – Beauvais whiteware (France)	Smooth fine white fabric with some quartz grains (Hurst <i>et al</i> 1986, 106–08; Brown 2002, 30).	1500–1600

The manor house at Cosmeston fell into decline in the 15th century, although it survived as a smaller settlement (Paterson 1934). The archaeological evidence for 16th- and 17th-century Cosmeston indicates that the households during this period were relatively wealthy and that a number of the medieval structures remained standing and in use. The ceramic assemblage dating from this period demonstrates that households at Cosmeston participated in local and European trading networks. The finds from the demolition layers and overlying yard surfaces, however, contain significant amounts of Bristol treacle-glazed ware (1690–1740), Bristol yellow-glazed cups and dishes (1680–1750) and north Devon wares (1650–1800), showing that these buildings probably fell out of use in the second quarter of the/mid 18th century.

The following focuses on two contexts which demonstrate the scale of trade between south Wales and north Somerset in the 16th and 17th centuries and the importance of the post-medieval Somerset pottery industry to the Bristol Channel region’s economy.<sup>1</sup> These two contexts are a representative sample of the range of ceramic fabrics found in other contemporary contexts at Cosmeston as well as the general trend to the use of Somerset wares identified on other sites across south Glamorgan in the 16th and early 17th centuries.

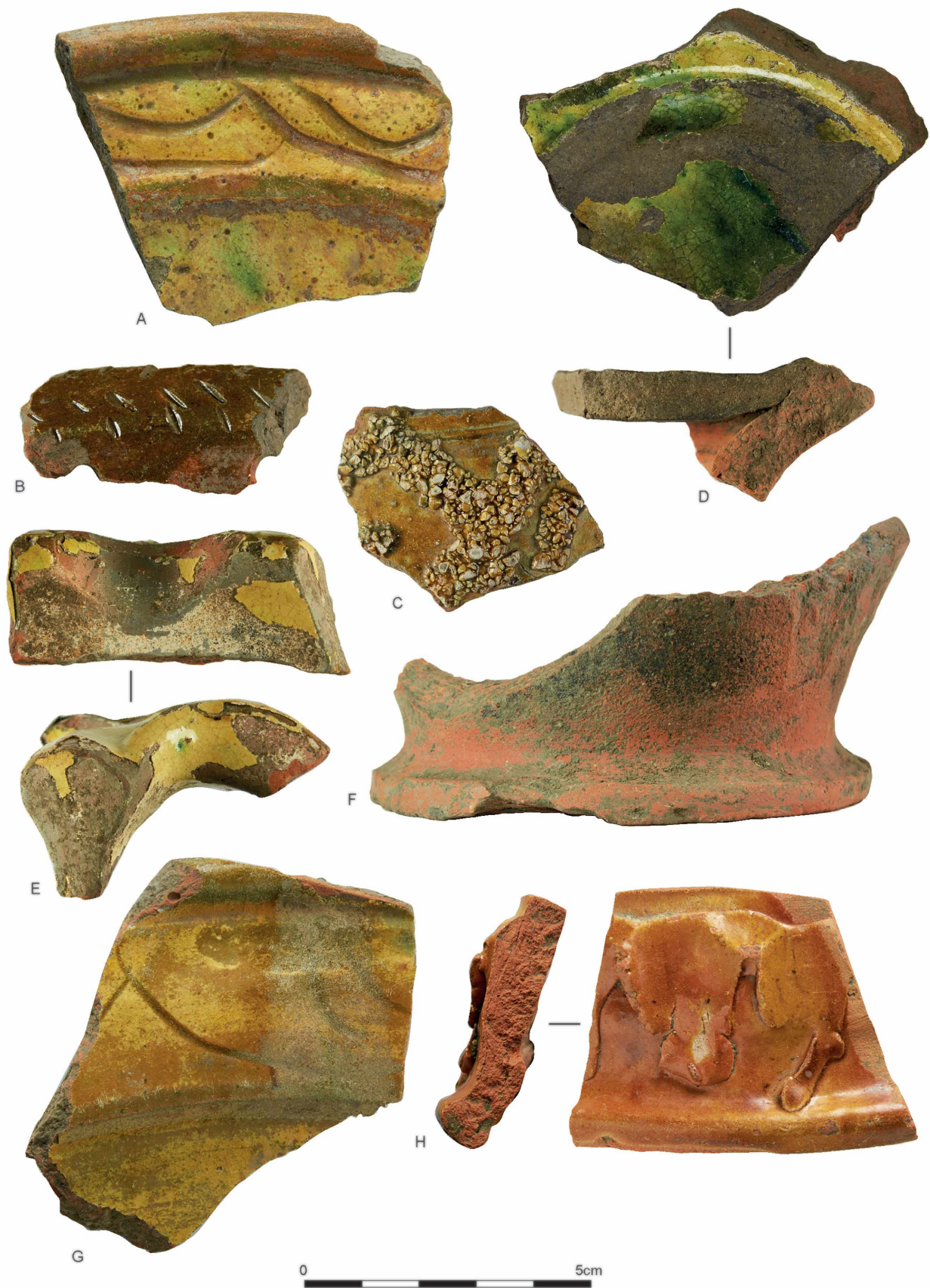
The first is a midden [110] containing large quantities of pottery, oyster shell and animal bone, which is situated at the lower end of the manorial site and overlies the demolished manor house. The second

area is a farmyard surface [432] which had a large amount of abraded ceramic material incorporated in it. It was associated with a large building which has been identified as medieval in origin but was still in use in the 16th and 17th centuries.

### The fabrics

The wide date range of the ceramics represented in these contexts (13th–17th centuries) is due to the nature of the contexts as a rubbish and clearance dump [110] and metallised surface which includes redeposited ceramic material as hardcore [432]. A fabric series was created specifically for Cosmeston due to the greater number of fabrics identified in the assemblage than is represented within the series held at the National Museum Wales (Cardiff), which does not include post-medieval pottery (Papazian and Campbell 1992). The fabrics were initially identified and numbered as part of the fabric series created for the author’s doctoral thesis (Forward 2013). Since then, however, there have been some slight changes, in particular to the Somerset and north Devon wares, which are presented here in greater detail and with slightly different numbering to that published (Forward 2013, Appendix 1). The fabrics summarised in Table 1 are those represented in the two selected contexts, rather than the complete list from the site.

Two fabrics will be further discussed in detail, Somerset and north Devon wares, both of which are significant to understanding the archaeology of south Wales for the 16th and 17th centuries. More



**Figure 3.** A selection of West Somerset ware forms and a Malvernian base (G) found in context 110; A: dish rim with sgraffito decoration, B: chafing dish rim, C: quartz decorated cup body sherd, D: the base of a chafing dish, E: rim and handle from a chafing dish, F: applied clay decorative pads. Image: Rachel Roberts





**Figure 4.** A selection of European imported vessels found in both contexts 110 and 432; A: Saintonge costrel handle, B: French cup base, C: Frechen flask rim, D: Portuguese redware handle, E: Portuguese redware rim, F: Berettino body sherds. Image: Rachel Roberts

often than not post-medieval assemblages are not properly understood, with identification proving to be incorrect with the terms ‘redwares’ or Ewenny wares (both inaccurate and misleading terms of identification) commonly being used (as discussed above). Recognising Somerset wares and the transition to north Devon dominated assemblages should be identified and correctly reported. The appearance and dominance of the north Devon wares indicates a shift in trading patterns and the supply of ceramics away from north Somerset. This change is represented in this paper with the post-medieval period split into two phases; the period when Somerset wares were prevalent

(c 1500–1650) and the change to the dominance of the north Devon wares (c 1650–1800). The period 1500–1650 is considered here to be fundamental to better understanding the early post-medieval period and providing clarity on interpretations on archaeological assemblages and sites in south Wales.

Within each context, and within the date range 1500–1650, a proportion of the sherds could confidently be attributed to specific identifiable vessels. For each of the contextual discussions below, the sherds associated with the identified vessels are the focus of the interpretation.

*Somerset wares*

The major issue with the Somerset fabrics has been the difficulty in distinguishing one from another, as they are all finely tempered red-firing ceramics. Recent developments in the identification of Somerset wares are of particular importance to understanding post-medieval pottery in south Wales, notably QEMSCAN analysis which has enabled a more detailed identification of the fabrics within these wares. The work on material from Taunton Castle (Anderson *et al* 2016; Dawson *et al* this volume) in particular has enabled differences to be realised and these in turn can be refined by the microscopic identification of these fabrics.

Distinguishing the west Somerset products from east or south Somerset ceramics is possible due to clear differences between each fabric. The west Somerset fabrics are characterised by white sub-rounded quartz within a clean but grainy clay matrix. In some cases there are also occasional to moderate calcareous inclusions. This is in contrast to the east Somerset fabrics which are less grainy and lack the white quartz grains or calcareous inclusions. In addition, the east Somerset wares appear to be thrown a little better, and the throwing lines are clear on the bowl within the Cosmeston group. The glazes on the west Somerset wares are slightly different: there is a red slip present on many of the vessels which is thought to result from the throwing technique employed by the west Somerset potters, rather than added. West Somerset vessels are also typically orange and red bodied, having been thoroughly re-oxidised, whilst the east Somerset wares more often than not have a reduced core. The south Somerset fabrics are also clearly identifiable, due to soft iron rich inclusions.

*North Devon wares*

North Devon wares (see Allan *et al* this volume) are ubiquitous across southern Wales from Pembrokeshire to Chepstow from the mid 17th century onwards. At their height of production in the 18th century north Devon ceramics were not only being extensively traded throughout the Bristol Channel region but were also part of the well documented trade with north America (Grant 1983). Five fabrics identified within the Cosmeston assemblage can be attributed to the north Devon kilns (see Table 1). The dating of these fabrics has been helped by the sgraffito wares, which were being made at the Stella Maris, Bideford by around 1660 and the decorative schemes seen in this assemblage are comparable to those of the late 17th-century decorative school (Allan 2005, 189). This complements the dating of the plain green glazed Gravel-tempered wares, as evidenced by the dated kiln site at Castle Hill, Great Torrington (Allan *et al* 2007) all of which appear in the stratified and well dated assemblage from Narrow Quay, Bristol (Good 1987) attributed to the mid 17th century.

**The midden**

In total, 1145 sherds weighing 12,585g were retrieved from context [110]. For the most part, the sherds can be placed in a broad date range from 1500–1650 (post-medieval) (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Despite the presence of a small amount of medieval pottery (*c* 1200–1500) and some intrusive material dating to *c* 1650–1800 from the overlying dumped deposit (108) (which also contained a large amount of pottery), the bulk of the assemblage from [110] can be dated to 1575–1650 (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). The group principally consists of wares from Somerset and north Devon, with small quantities of other products from western England and continental imports (Table 3).

**Table 2.** Composition of the midden assemblage from Cosmeston by period

Period	Sherd count		Weight (g)	
Roman	1	0.09%	20	0.16%
Medieval	40	3.49%	439.8	3.49%
Post medieval	1072	93.62%	12031.8	95.60%
Post medieval Later	22	1.92%	52.4	0.42%
Modern	10	0.87%	41	0.33%
Total	1145	100.00%	12585	100.00%

**Table 3.** Minimum number of Somerset vessels by form from the midden at Cosmeston

Vessel forms	Count of MNIV
Bowl	30
Chafing dish	6
Chamber pot	1
Cup	10
Cup/Jug	1
Dish	7
Jar	3
Jug	2
Porringer	1
Tall jar	1
Tankard	1
Total	63

**Table 4.** Composition of the Cosmeston midden assemblage by fabric and form (vessels dated to the post-medieval period, 1575–1650)

Fabric	Sherd	Bowl	Chafing dish	Chamber pot	Costrel	Cup	Dish	Drug jar	Jar	Jug	Flask	Porringer	Tall jar	Tankard	Total
Beruttino							1								1
Brist Tin glazed	1						1	1							3
Falfield						1									1
Frechen						1			1		1				3
Malvernian		1								1					2
NDCal		1													1
NDGF		1				1			1	1					4
NDGT		1				1			4						6
NDGTearly		3							2	1					6
Portuguese Redware					1	1									2
Raeren						1									1
Sgraffito							4								4
Somerset East		1													1
Somerset West		29	6	1		11	7		3	2		1	1	1	62
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>97</b>

### *Somerset wares*

Somerset wares represent the greatest number of sherds by count (875 sherds) and weight (9727g) (81% for both) within the midden assemblage. Of these sherds, 195 (5147g) can be assigned to specific individual vessels. Distinguishing between west, east and south Somerset fabrics was essential to understanding the group. West Somerset wares dominate the assemblage with a minimum number of 63 vessels identified (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). No south Somerset vessels were present and only one east Somerset bowl was identified.

There are a number of indicators that this group is earlier rather than later post-medieval in date. For example, the Somerset sgraffito decorated dishes (5 out of the 7 dishes) (see Fig 3A and 3G) are considered to be late 16th century in date (Good 1984, 45). The cup forms and small jugs (14 vessels represented in total) are also typically dated to the late 16th and early 17th centuries (Good 1987, 78). The chafing dishes within this assemblage find parallels on two contemporary and well dated sites in Bristol (Narrow Quay and St Nicholas Almshouses) where the chafing dish forms, with triangular cut-outs in the base and a wavy rim, are considered to be late 16th to early 17th century in date (Good 1987) (Fig 3D–E and 1H).

The quantity of bowls within the assemblage is

noteworthy. These bowls, elsewhere referred to as pancheons, were particularly large vessels: each bowl has a rim diameter greater than 360mm. These vessels are typically associated with dairying activities and would suggest that this was a specialist activity at Cosmeston at this time.

The dominance of Somerset wares in south Wales prior to the shift to north Devon wares, is a clear chronological indicator. The Malvernian wares which dominate the Bristol market and the Severn valley networks, by contrast, only appear in small numbers in south Glamorgan assemblages. In the midden assemblage they comprise two vessels, a bowl and a jug (10 sherds, weighing 187g) which, together with a cup from the Falfield pottery, Gloucestershire (16 sherds, weighing 81g), provide slight evidence for late 16th-century peripheral trade networks.

### *North Devon wares*

The shift to north Devon dominated assemblages by the mid 17th century can be attested within the Cosmeston assemblage in later contexts but importantly the midden assemblage has some earlier north Devon wares, previously unidentified. The most significant discovery within the midden group was a small group of early 16th-century north Devon vessels (NDGTearly in Table 3; 60 sherds, 847g), the first known occurrence on a site in south Wales. Six vessels

are represented, comprising three bowls with the thin rim form typical of the 16th century, two jars and a jug. Additionally, North Devon Calcareous ware (NDGTcal in Table 3; 1 sherd, 61g) is also present within the assemblage. The one identifiable vessel is of bowl form 3k, again with an early rim form (see Allan 2005 for the full range of forms).

Whilst North Devon Gravel-tempered wares are more common, with 23 sherds (266g) in the fine variant (NDGF in Table 3) and 53 sherds (609g) in the coarser fabric (NDGT in Table 3), most of the vessels, are represented by early bowl rim forms and can be attributed to the early 17th century thus supporting the suggested late 16th- to early 17th century date range for the assemblage. Two of the rim sherds, a jar rim sherd in the fine fabric and a bowl in the coarser fabric are thickened, typologically an indicator of later 17th century in date (Allan and Morris 2017, 16–17) but it is considered that these are likely to be intrusive to the group.

*Imported Wares*

Imports comprise two sherds of Italian Berettino ware (Fig 4F), a handle and rim sherds from a Portuguese redware cup (6 sherds, 51g; Fig 4D–E) and a flask and a jar in Frechen stoneware (3 sherds, 27g; Fig 2C); all are typically dated to the 16th or early 17th century and occur on other sites in south Wales (Evans 1983; Forward 2014b) as well as along the south side of the Bristol Channel (Good 1987; Allan 1999; Allan 2017; Dawson *et al* this volume). Although small, the Cosmeston group is significant when considered alongside the early north Devon and west Somerset wares, reinforcing the suggested date of the midden assemblage and reflecting the trading networks to which Cosmeston belonged.

**Yard surface**

The ceramics from the yard surface [432] total 328 sherds, weighing 4.056kg (Table 5). The yard surface is associated with a building built in the medieval period, with a succession of yard surfaces, including the one under discussion here, surrounding it. Running alongside the building and yard surface are parallel drainage ditches which appear to have been regularly cleaned and cleared demonstrating that the area was particularly prone to flooding. The cleaning and clearing of the ditch would have provided good yard surface material in the form of ceramic material acting as hardcore. This would certainly explain the presence of 18% of the number of pottery sherds dating from the medieval period. 25% of the sherds fit into the later post-medieval period and demonstrate that this phase of the yard surface likely continued into the later post-medieval period. The majority of these later sherds have been identified as North Devon Gravel-tempered wares. The greatest number of sherds from the yard surface (57%) can however be attributed

**Table 5.** Composition of the yard assemblage from Cosmeston by period

Period	Sherd count		Weight (g)	
Medieval	60	18%	454.6	13%
Post-medieval	187	57%	2600.1	64%
Post-medieval later	81	25%	1001.7	24%
Total	328	100%	4056.4	100%

to the earlier post-medieval period and it is this group of sherds which will be further discussed.

*Somerset wares*

The proportion of Somerset wares is less than in the midden amounting to 51% by count and 59% by weight (168 sherds, 2387g) and all are west Somerset fabrics. From the yard surface 27 vessels have been identified comprising dishes, both plain glazed and sgraffito decorated, chafing dishes, a candlestick, a pipkin, jugs, and cups (see **Error! Reference source not found.**), all of which are forms typically dated to the late 16th to early 17th century. There are significantly fewer bowls present within this group of material with only one bowl represented in a Somerset fabric, a marked difference to the midden from which 30 Somerset ware bowls were retrieved.

**Table 6.** Minimum number of Somerset vessels by form from the yard at Cosmeston

Vessel Form	MNIV
Bowl	1
Candlestick	1
Chafing dish	2
Cup	3
Dish	14
Jar	4
Jug	1
Pipkin	1
Total	27

Of particular note is the presence of a quartz encrusted west Somerset ware cup (Fig 3C). Quartz decorated cups are not unusual in the 16th to earlier 17th centuries, with Cistercian wares and Portuguese redware vessels using impressed quartz to create simple geometric patterns. The Somerset vessels are more



**Table 7.** Composition of the Cosmeston yard assemblage by fabric and form (vessels dated to the post-medieval period, 1575–1650)

Fabric	?	Bowl	Candlestick	Chafing dish	Crock	Cup	Dish	Jar	Jug	Pipkin	Total
Frechen	1										1
Malvernian								1			1
Midland black?						1					1
NDGF						1			1		2
NDGT		2			1		2	2	1		8
NDGT early						1	1				2
PMSaintonge						2					2
Raeren						1					1
Somerset West		1	1	2		3	14	4	1	1	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>45</b>

lavishly decorated with large angular crushed quartz fragments applied to the clay surface and covered with the lead glaze. Parallels for the Cosmeston find can be seen in assemblages from Exeter (Allan 1984, 190–1) and Cardiff Castle (Forward 2014a) and are similarly highly quartzed.

#### *North Devon ware*

Two vessels, a cup and a dish, have been identified as being earlier north Devon-products due to their fabric and form types, but most of this group (66 sherds, 854g) has been assigned to the later post-medieval group, as the forms are more typical of those found in later 17th-century deposits (Table 7). This later period, therefore, appears to be better represented than in the midden group, as the north Devon sherds amount to 21% of the yard assemblage by weight and 17% by sherd count).

#### *Imported wares*

The range of post-medieval imported wares (12 sherds, 126g) is slightly different to those from the midden, comprising sherds from a Saintonge costrel (Fig 4A) and a French cup (Fig 2B), a Raeren stoneware cup handle and a body sherd of a Frechen stoneware vessel. The Saintonge costrel is interesting as post-medieval French wares are generally much less common than Portuguese and Spanish imports in south Wales.

The range of West Somerset ware forms from the yard is strikingly different. Whilst both contexts contain a range of tablewares, the limited number of bowls from the yard group is significant. This is clearly very different to the midden assemblage where 30 Somerset bowls have been identified. Equally, the presence of only one north Devon bowl indicates a continuity of ceramic usage within the area of this

building. The use of sherds of pottery as hardcore is clear within the yard ceramic groups in general within this area of the site, and apparently necessary due to the wet nature of the area. We don't fully understand the systems of waste management for Cosmeston at this point in time but using an easily available resource, pottery that is no longer considered useful within the household, would seem logical. Directly associating the pottery from the yard surface with the building assumes a depositional practice, providing an interpretive model which relates the ceramics to those living within the house. Using this depositional hypothesis, it is most likely that the imported German stoneware and French cups, a Malvernian jar (Fig 3F) and a Midland black cup, as well as the Somerset candlestick, the decorated dishes and chafing dishes are directly associated with and would have once been used and considered important items within this household. Additionally, as mentioned in the introduction to this section, the cleaning and clearing of the ditches running parallel to this plot would have provided a place to deposit rubbish as well as a source of material to redeposit when needed. Central to this however is the importance of Somerset vessels at this period in time and certainly their dominance within the yard assemblage demonstrates this.

## Discussion

Post-medieval pottery has been an under appreciated resource in south Wales. A series of papers (Lewis 1927; Williams 1955; 1960) in the early to mid 20th century examining the south Wales port books all conclude that the scale of local trade was certainly greater than is often recognised (Williams 1955). As Williams (1955, 199) states '... the ramifications of the

coastal trade of Glamorgan went far beyond the small ports or creeks and its influences on native culture have yet to be examined'. The growing use of cars and consequent reduction in the use of boats for local travel means that our perception of movement in daily life has changed, certainly in the south Glamorgan area. Until relatively recently, the local seafarer would have been the equivalent of a delivery driver, and north Devon and Somerset would have been more accessible and connected to south Wales via the Bristol Channel than they are today.

### The ceramic repertoire

Somerset and early north Devon wares are critical to understanding the nature of the assemblage from Cosmeston as they provide a temporal and social framework, and can consequently help to build an understanding of the households they were associated with. The most significant discovery is the presence of 16th-century north Devon vessels within the midden as this fabric was hitherto unknown on an archaeological site in south Wales (Allan and Morris 2017). The ability to recognise and identify this ceramic ware will certainly help provide the opportunities to identify early post-medieval archaeology in south Glamorgan and begin to fill in the gap in our knowledge.

The group from the yard surface is broadly contemporary with that from the midden deposit, but has a slightly longer date range. The fact that north Devon ware represents 21% (854g) or 17% (66 sherds) of the assemblage and includes later form types suggests that the yard continued in use into the late 17th century, but, from the absence of later white wares, and the very few Treacle or Yellow wares, not into the 18th century.

The two assemblages contain both table and utilitarian wares but it is the midden deposit that contains the significant numbers of utilitarian forms, large bowls or, as called elsewhere, pancheons. One of the major exports to Somerset from the Vale of Glamorgan was butter, and dairying was likely to have been an agricultural industry carried out across the area during this period. Households were multi-functional, practising a range of economic activities with cloth, butter, and other goods all being produced within these communities. Cosmeston appears to have been no exception. Within the midden group all 37 of the bowls, this includes all fabric types, have a rim diameter of 360mm or more, suggesting that they were pancheons used in dairying. Whether this represents a community engaged primarily in dairying is purely conjectural, but a programme of lipid analysis could help to answer questions of function.

The tablewares are a diverse group, probably representing the full range of forms available to people at this time. As well as the Somerset produced sgraffito decorated dishes, chafing dishes and cups, households also had access to what would probably

have been regarded as luxury, or special, ceramics and the presence of imported wares within the assemblage confirms the scale of the trading networks which existed within the Bristol Channel region. People were being influenced by the social and cultural trends spreading across Europe, and the resulting changes, which so characterise the early post-medieval period in southern England (Gaimster 2003), are reflected within the material culture of the households at Cosmeston and more broadly in south Wales.

The material from the midden appears to have accumulated through to the mid 17th century as the majority of pottery, as well as the clay pipes, would suggest this to be the main phase of deposition. The 16th-century group of material within this assemblage and the imports in the yard group are important. This is a period not often recognised archaeologically and the ceramics here provide significant evidence for the long duration of the post-medieval households at Cosmeston. By the time these ceramics were discarded they were no longer useful, possibly unfashionable and other ceramics had by this point become more useful to the people living and working in these households.

### Local trade

The economy of the Bristol Channel is complex. Large ships sailing up the Channel from Spain and Portugal, or travelling between England and Ireland would have docked at Milford, Swansea, and, in particular, Chepstow, where cargo was unpacked and reloaded onto smaller boats, in order to avoid many of the taxes on goods at the Bristol Port (Dimmock 2005). In between all of this smaller boats or ships were regularly crossing the Bristol Channel between the English and Welsh coastline. This localised trade is that most commonly reflected in the archaeological record, but is also most often forgotten or not considered worthy of further detailed analysis.

What can be concluded is that the Cosmeston households were engaged in a rural economy and very clearly one that encompassed the Bristol Channel region. The settlement is only 1 mile from the sea and only 2.5 miles from Sully: from here the port books record trade between Sully and Uphill, with cattle and butter being the main products crossing over to Somerset. As demonstrated, west Somerset pottery is the dominant fabric type at Cosmeston, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries clearly indicating that the routes across the Bristol Channel were central to the movement of goods within this region and that ceramics are very likely to have been traded within this local network. The Bristol Channel, therefore, was far from a divisive feature - rather it provided a means of cross channel connections.

To conclude, the ceramic evidence for coastal trade, markets and mariners, demonstrates not only the significance of the trading routes between south Wales and north Somerset and Devon, but also the social and

cultural influences that would have been manifested within households in this period. The port books do not identify the nuances of local trade and whilst pottery is probably only one of many unrecorded artefact types, the range of ceramic material and the emphasis on the Somerset wares at Cosmeston demonstrates buoyancy in the local markets between the two regions. The hills of the Vale of Glamorgan look across to the Somerset coast: the Bristol Channel was an important connection and the communities along the coastlines would have had shared ideas, world views and ceramic desires.

## Endnote

1 Clay pipes were recovered from both deposits and may help to refine the dating, however work on the clay pipe assemblage has not yet been completed.

## Acknowledgements

I am indebted to David Dawson and John Allan for their unending patience, time and help. The first time I looked at the material David agreed to come and visit and that was in June 2011. Six years on and a return to the material was beneficial for the additional knowledge gained on my part through hours spent with both David and John trying to remember the nuances of south-western English pottery. Thanks are also due to Duncan Brown who helped identify and confirm the French material, and to John Hines who read and commented on the draft. The photographs were kindly prepared by Rachel Roberts of Cardiff University.

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### Résumé

Cet article (présenté à la conférence du Medieval Pottery Research Group à Taunton en 2016) étudie l’approvisionnement et la consommation des céramiques dans le sud du Pays de Galles pendant la période post-médiévale. Il se concentre spécifiquement sur le sud du comté de Glamorgan et le site de Cosmeston, qui fournit un important assemblage stratifié et qui peut être utilisé comme site type permettant de démontrer l’utilisation et les traditions de la céramique au début de la période post-médiévale dans le sud du Pays de Galles. Après avoir passé en revue l’histoire des études sur la poterie post-médiévale dans la région, l’article traite de la poterie post-médiévale de deux groupes de Cosmeston dans le contexte plus large des réseaux économiques et sociaux du canal de Bristol.

### Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag (vorgetragen auf der MPRG 2016 Konferenz in Taunton) widmet sich dem Angebot und Konsum von Keramik im frühneuzeitlichen Südwesten. Dabei richtet sich das Hauptaugenmerk insbesondere auf South Glamorgan und den Fundort Cosmeston, von dem eine wichtige stratifizierte Fundsammlung stammt und der als Referenzfundort genutzt werden kann, mit dessen Hilfe sich Keramiknutzung und -traditionen während der Frühneuzeit in Südwesten nachvollziehen lassen. Nach einem Rückblick auf die Geschichte frühneuzeitlicher Keramikstudien in der Region wird die frühneuzeitliche Keramik von zwei Fundorten in Cosmeston im weiteren Kontext der wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Netzwerke des Bristolkanals diskutiert.

