

THE MEDIEVAL POTTERY FOUND AT PIG'S PARADISE, LUNDY, IN 2001

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ABSTRACT

An archaeological watching brief conducted at Pig's Paradise in 2000 recovered about 1450 sherds of pottery. This is the most substantial find of medieval pottery recorded from the island. The earliest finds, dating to the 11th and 12th centuries, were of wares made close to the Upper Greensand of the South Somerset-Devon border. The rest of the collection is broadly datable to the 13th and 14th centuries. Most of the collection is of North Devon type, but there are examples of glazed jugs and coarsewares from the Bristol area and Somerset.

Keywords: *Medieval Pottery, Pig's Paradise.*

INTRODUCTION

Whilst carrying out the archaeological watching brief on the trench dug for the new heating pipes at Pig's Paradise in 2000, Shirley Blaylock encountered an unexpectedly large and significant collection (about 1450 sherds) of medieval pottery. The findings were reported to the LFS in that year (Blaylock, 2000). The purpose of the present short communication is to indicate the general conclusions that can be drawn from this pottery, following an initial study of the collection. A more detailed study, which will include examination of selected sherds under the binocular microscope and study of the chemistry of their fabrics, using Inductively Coupled Plasma analysis, will be published in due course in the Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society.

This is not, of course, the first occasion on which samples of medieval and later pottery have been recovered from the island. The excavations by Keith Gardner and Trevor Miles in the 1960s excavated quite sizeable collections from various parts of the island, including some medieval sherds and imported Spanish wares (Gardner,

1962). These finds remain in the stores of Barnstaple Museum, a full description of them has not yet been published. More recently, the excavations by the Central Excavation Unit in the 1970s at the castle brought to light a smaller series of sherds, which received only the briefest of descriptions in the published report. Large quantities of pottery were found by D.W.R. and C. Thackray during their excavations of at the castle's Parade Ground in the 1980s, but nearly all of it was of 19th century and later date. The new finds, therefore, offer the first opportunity to study such material more fully.

A first point that can be drawn from the new finds is that Pig's Paradise must have been the site of a medieval settlement; a collection of this quantity of pottery is typical of the site of a medieval farmhouse or hamlet (see Figure 1). The date-range of the sherds offers the first evidence of its period of occupation. Unexpectedly, there is evidence of occupation during the 11th and 12th centuries. Occupation is indicated by the presence of a series of sherds whose inclusions derive from the Greensand of the Blackdown Hills, on the border of Somerset and Devon. Pottery of this type is now being recognised on a wide range of sites in South West England in the Saxo-Norman period; the pattern of long distance transport of pottery of this period broke down in the 13th century with the emergence of many more local kilns. The bulk of the collection belongs to the 13th and 14th centuries. Although the types of pottery represented were all used into the 15th century, none of the forms distinctive of the period after c. 1350 are present, so it seems likely that occupation was abandoned soon after the time of the Black Death.

A second aspect of the study of the collection is the identification of the sources of the pottery. Lundy could have drawn on the wares of a variety of kilns which operated around the Bristol Channel. In fact, fully 85% of the sample is of North Devon type, providing good visual matches to the pottery made from the early 13th century in Barnstaple, Bideford and perhaps also in nearby parishes. Here, however, there is a problem, since it is possible that very similar pottery was widely distributed along the South West coast and is also plentiful in parts of Ireland. The finds also include sherds of other types of jug which were probably sent out from Bristol, as well as coarsewares from the Bristol area. A further type of fabric is limestone-tempered and this is most likely to have come from the Mendips. Finally, a few later medieval sherds probably come from various kilns in south Somerset.

Although there is quite a wide range of material here, the collection makes a very striking contrast with the collections from the Isles of Scilly, which are much more diverse in character, with much more evidence of imported French finds. Overall the picture presented by the Lundy finds is that the medieval islanders were very heavily dependent on the ports of Barnstaple and Bideford for their household goods, as visitors are nowadays.

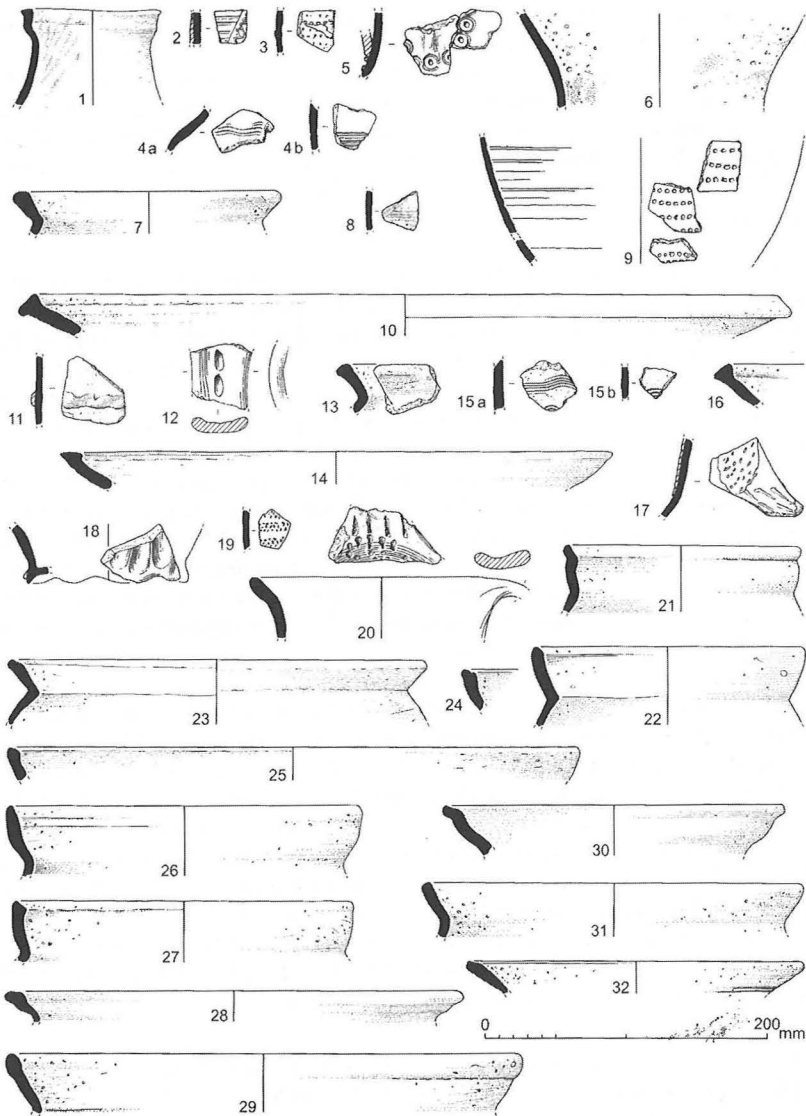


Figure 1. Medieval pottery from Pig's Paradise.

Key. Numbers against each drawing refer to pottery from Pig's Paradise including Ham Green wares (1 - 4) and vessels from North Devon (20 - 32).

Drawing by Jane Read, Exeter Archaeology.

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