

A late medieval pottery at Stirling

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A passing reference to a 'pigmakar' called Moffat in Stirling in 1521 has long been accepted as evidence of a local pottery at that period (Renwick, 1886, p. 10; Caldwell & Dean, 1986, p. 107). This note presents some documentary evidence about the location of a Stirling pottery of the late fifteenth and sixteenth century though so far there is no direct evidence of the character of its product.

In 1469 William Mason and his spouse gave legal warning to John Moffatt, burgess of Stirling, to remove from the lands of Guse Croft and Claycroft (Stirling Protocol Book. p. 2). These both lie adjacent to Chapel Croft [Map 1]. In 1480 an annualrent was payable by Thomas Moffat from land 'at the toun end' on the south side of the street, between the lands of John Younger on the north and the common burn on the south, the Common Burn in this case being the mill lead, flowing north to the Burgh Mill dam on the west side of Gusecroft (SCA Murray of Polmaise, charters, 1st Series, Item 25). The next record is the 1521 item referring to Moffat, the pigmakar, his first name missing in the document, though his being a cautioner or guarantor points to a man of some standing. In 1549, a charter describes a croft and yard pertaining to St Ninian's Chapel and a part of the Chapel Croft as being between the highway and the pottery on the west, the covered passage on the north, the Goosecroft on the east and the lands of Bissat on the south. Similar terms are used in later documents (SCA B66/25/119). In 1570 another document refers to property at St Ninians Chapel Croft, between the highway to the potter's house and the potter's house itself on the west and the Goosecroft on the east, a form of words repeated with variations in a later document (SCA B66/25/135/1; B66/25/140).

The details would be consistent with a site at the foot of the slope rising to the modern St Ninians Well Green (the modern name for Chapel Croft). Either the mill lead or the outflow from the well at the chapel could have supplied the water. Its proximity to the Claycroft is, presumably, significant. Claycroft is on record in 1469 and again in 1472 and 1478 (Stirling Protocol Book p. 2, 39, 61). Another site which is conceivably relevant is Ovenlands, on record by 1582 and associated with Thirty Acres, mapped in 1780 south of the Forth at NS 8093 some 200m north east of St Ninians Well Green (Charles Ross, A Map of Stirlingshire, 1780; SCA Stirling Burgh Council Minutes, B66/20/5 f. 102v; SCA Protocol Book of Robert Ramsay, B66/1/5 p. 350-1).

In March 1543 eight dozen earthenware pots were purchased in Stirling for use in the kitchens of Marie de Guise and were transported to Linlithgow, then her main residence. The record would be consistent with their being supplied by this pottery and is of added interest since it is associated with purchase of other vessels of wood, also for use about the household (NAS E33/3/4 f. 6v).

There are later sixteenth and early seventeenth century records of potters but at least some of these, and also the site name Potter Hill (adjacent to the burgh gate, close to but not contiguous to Chapel Croft) can be discounted as referring to the makers of pewter, rather than ceramic pots. For example, a 1618 record of a house and yard, formerly belonging to John Scott, potter and then to Walter, his son, adjacent to the Potter Hill and to the west of the Chapel Croft. Both Scotts were pewterers (SCA B66/16/3 f 80; Harrison, 1991). Another source of confusion is that the Stirling pottery site, though so close to the burgh of Stirling, was in or contiguous with the parish of St Ninians, leading some writers to assume that there were two sites. What appeared to be a promising source, the 'Auld Rental' of the chapel croft and adjacent areas from 1447, proved disappointing with no unambiguous records, even the mention of [-] Aikman 'the potter' being equivocal and undateable (SCA SB6/6/2/4). The street name Potter Row is recorded somewhere in the St Ninians Chapel Croft vicinity in the 1851 census return, perhaps a 'folk memory' of a long-vanished industry.

TA vol IV has an entry for Potters and references to Stirling Potters; they seem to be involved with casting guns!

Recent chemical analysis of Scottish White Gritty Ware found within the town has been interpreted as suggesting a possible local source. The documented dates of the Chapel Croft pottery would be late for Scottish White Gritty Ware or for Scottish Medieval Redware also found locally. But if, as Jones et al suggest, White Gritty Ware manufacture stopped when supplies of suitable clay ran out, the possibility of a local resurgence to exploit a new source cannot be discounted (Jones et al. 2003; Will and Addyman, 2008). The best-known source of Scottish Post-medieval Reduced Ware is at Throsk, some miles to the east of Stirling which is not documented until 1610 though it may have functioned for some time before that (Will and Addyman, 2008; Jones et al., 2003; Harrison, 2002; Caldwell and Dean, 1986). On the face of things (and however sketchy the evidence) this pottery seems to fill something of a gap between truly medieval and early modern ceramics in Scotland.

Unfortunately the St Ninians Well area has been extensively redeveloped with construction of substantial buildings, roads and car parks so that the chance of any trace of the pottery kilns being located are slight. The Ovenlands area is now part of the Springkerse Industrial Estate and almost equally devastated.

References

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Manuscripts are all in Stirling Council Archives (SCA).



Map 1. St Ninians Chapel Croft and adjacent areas. The 'common burn' or mill lead ran on or close to the burgh boundary, east of St Ninians Croft and then south of North Claycrofts (Renwick, 1889).