

Shootinglee 2023

Introduction

Thanks to a second generous grant from the SPMA awarded to the writer in 2023, significant additional progress has been made on the post-excavation work. The grant awarded in 2023 was targeted at research by ceramic specialist Derek Hall on the pottery from two buildings excavated during the 2020-2022 seasons and the preparation of publication drawings of stone and bone objects by archaeological illustrator Alan Braby, which Piers Dixon is researching. In addition analysis of the shards of possible window glass is being carried out by historic glass specialist Dr Helen Spencer. Robin Murdoch's analysis of the vessel and bottle glass and environmental analysis of the carbonised seeds, plants and wood fragments from the peel house by Susan Ramsay has not been completed and will be reported on next year.

Pottery analysis

The pottery analysis by Derek Hall has been a vital element in helping to date the sequencing of the various phases of activity on the site. He has shown that the pottery assemblage indicates a late medieval phase in the occupation of the site, despite the limited number of medieval structures excavated. The pottery from Trench 7 included 9 sherds of Scottish Redware dating to the 14th-15th centuries including one from a layer within the primary phase pen in the corner of the yard. 17th-18th century Scottish Post-medieval Oxidised Wares and Slipped Redwares were found under the west wall of the byre confirming the dating suggested by the clay pipe from the make-up layer on which the byre was constructed, but 19th century pottery indicated that the wall was rebuilt.

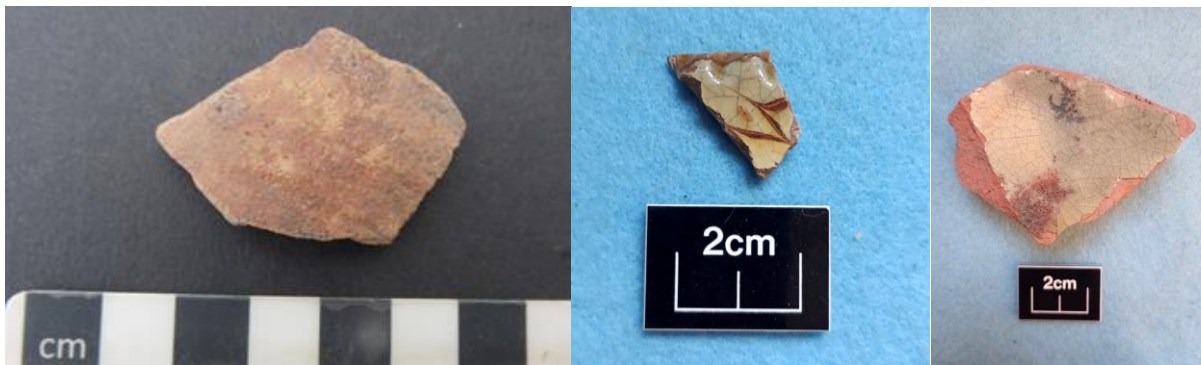


Figure 1 the sherd of 14th-15th century Scottish Redware from the primary phase pen, left; a pie-crust rim-sherd, middle; a basal angle sherd of Slip Glazed Redware of 17th/18th century date, right. © J. Durham (left) and D. Hall (middle and right).

The pottery from the building in Trench 8 was either Scottish Post-medieval Oxidised Ware of 17th-18th century date or 19th century wares. One very small sherd of 19th century piece Creamware was found in the demolition layer providing a date for its demolition, but as the wall construction matches that of the peel house in scale it would be appropriate to date the building to the same period as the peel house in the absence of anything securely stratified.

Stone and bone objects

Analysis of the stone and bone objects by the author and drawing of selected pieces by Alan Braby have shown that the assemblage, although small, includes domestic objects as well as building artefacts.

The latter includes fragments of stone slates, the best of which has three sides of the bottom end of a slate that may have come from the roof in the peel house's final phase. The absence of fragments from the burning event argues against their earlier use as does environmental data discussed in the (SPMA Newsletter 92 Spring 2023). The largest stone find was a large dressed sandstone quoin found in the tumble at the corner of the 17th century extension to the peel house, where it was presumably reused, since the corner was rounded. It is most likely to have derived from a late medieval building on the site.

The domestic objects include shale gaming pieces and pot lids, haematite used in the marking of sheep, two spindle whorls, several whetstones and a fragment of a quern stone reused in the floor of the 19th century stable (Figure 2.1-2). The quern stone is particularly interesting as it suggests the local grinding of corn was conducted outside the manorial context of thirlage that required corn to be taken to the lord's mill. This may be due to the farm being within the royal forest, where there were no mills. Comparable examples from Portmahomack (Highland) and Caerlaverock Old Castle (Dumfries & Galloway) date to the 13th-14th centuries. The single bone artefact from the site appears to be a bone awl with a hole chiselled through one end of a chicken femur, possibly for use in making or repairing hunting or fishing nets.

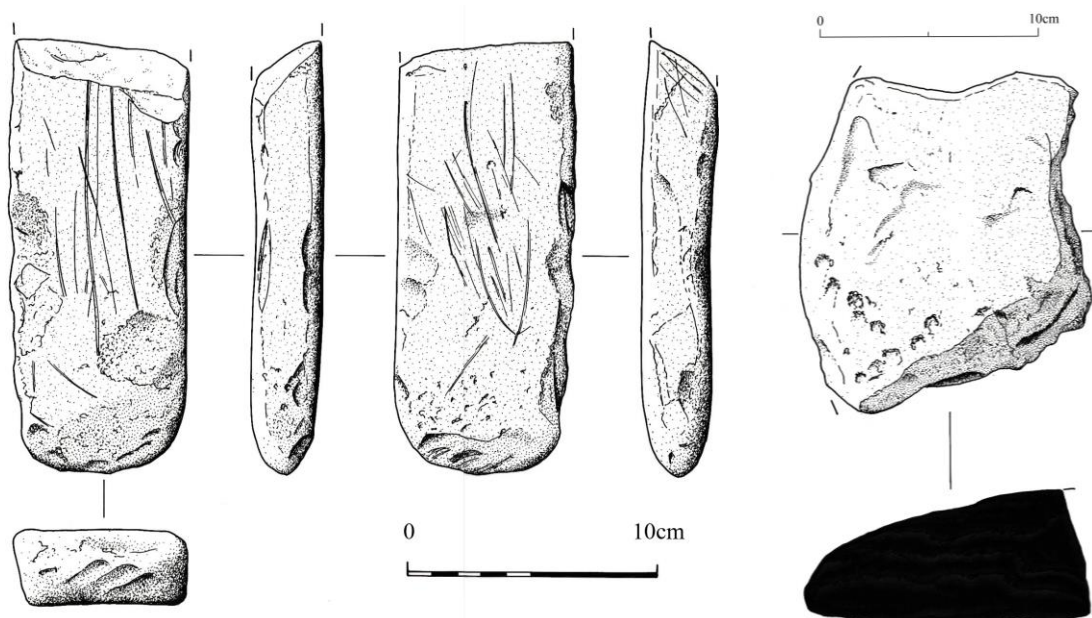


Figure 2.1-2 left, the rotary quern fragment found in the floor of the stable, with an estimated diameter of 300mm; right a whetstone with sharpening grooves. Drawing by Alan Braby

Other research: Window glass

In addition to the work funded by the SPMA, mention may also be made of a small assemblage of window glass being analysed by Dr Helen Spencer of the University of Heriot Watt using pXRF analysis. Application of this technique helps to narrow down the manufacturing dates of the shards from the excavations based on the presence of or concentrations of different elements in the glass. The assemblage may be small at five shards, but the context of one of the shards was the burning event in the modified peel house, dated by clay pipe to the third quarter of the 17th century. Its presence there indicates that at least one of the windows in this phase was glazed. Helen has indicated that three of the shards are high-lime low-alkali glass which dates to the period 1567 – c1700, one of which one is from the burning event (Figure 3). However, a shard that comes from the final floor of the extension to the peel house is soda glass with a date horizon of the 1830s. As this postdates by 30 years any other datable evidence, it is proposed to carry out Scanning Electron Microscopy to check this conclusion.



Figure 3 grozed high lime low alkali glass shard from the mid-17th century phase of the peel house.
© J. Durham.

Now fully into its post-excavation stage following the completion of fieldwork, the Shootinglee project is set to be a significant/major contribution to our understanding of the rural settlement record in southern Scotland during the Late and Post-Medieval periods.

Acknowledgements

In addition to the post-excavation work funded by the Society for Post Medieval Archaeology in 2021 and 2023, I should like to thank The Hunter Archaeological Trust for a grant in 2021, Scottish Borders Council for funding radiocarbon dates and the Forestry Commission for the removal of trees. The project has also received much appreciated support in kind from Dennis Gallagher (clay pipe), Carl Savage and Jesper Ericsson (coins), Helen Spencer (window glass) and Scott Timpany and Susan Ramsay (carbonised seeds and wood samples).