

Appleby Archaeology Group April 2008

Appleby Archaeology concluded its winter programme in April when Jo Dawson from Greenlane Archaeology, Ulverston spoke to the group on Post Medieval Pottery.

Post medieval pottery has tended to be disregarded by archaeologists and the sherds from the period were ignored as they removed the upper layers of soil in their quest to find out about earlier times. High status pottery, such as Wedgwood cream ware, survives in collections in houses and museums and lower status items, such as tobacco jars and Christening mugs, survive as family heirlooms and are often seen on programmes such as The Antiques Road Show. Post medieval pottery was found at the recent excavation at the K-Village site at Kendal and specialist analysis of this assemblage has been done.

The 17th century saw the beginning of the consumer age with pottery being produced in more forms, patterns and colours. The medieval shapes were replaced by vessels with specific functions and most are easily recognised today.

Jo's research started in 1999, while on a walk to look at a hill fort near Craiglochart, Edinburgh. She discovered fragments of pottery, glass and other materials on the surface of a midden. As she collected and examined these finds it soon became clear that these were not a random distribution of peoples' rubbish. Many of the sherds were white and came from sets with a band of colour and stripe of the same colour around the rim, one set having a red band and stripe the other a blue. Her interest increased when she found sherds of the blue and white pattern which included the crest of the City of Edinburgh, and a banner above with the words "Edinburgh City Poor House".

She decided to look at the pottery in a wider context and she collected and examined sherds from the surface of middens from nearby intuitions including the site of the Royal Edinburgh Asylum and .Edinburgh City Hospital, before excavating a small trench in the main midden at the Poorhouse

A significant part of her research was studying documents relating to the institutions such as histories, letters order forms and minutes of meetings. Correspondence from the pottery factories and their pattern books were also examined.

A number of deductions were made following detailed analysis of the information obtained. The pottery dated to a period extending from the 1870s to the early 20th century. It was possible to identify where most of the pottery had been produced and what made up a typical collection, and from this to gain insight into the social conditions within the institutions at the time.

The earliest crockery from the Poorhouse consisted of soup bowls with the Edinburgh crest and associated with them were tin mugs and soup spoons. In 1875 a new set of crockery with a slightly different pattern was ordered and this order included pottery tankards. In 1891 the crockery was replaced and the range was extended to include plates, soup plates, pudding bowls, and a variety of serving dishes. Items of cutlery now included knives and forks.

Indications from these finds suggest that the arrangements for serving food and the diet altered during the period. It is likely that in 1870 the food given to the paupers was of the type that could be eaten from a bowl with a spoon and that it was dished out to all from one location.. With the introduction of serving dishes in 1891 it is likely that a least some of the food was served to smaller groups, possibly serving themselves, and the presence of cutlery suggests a more varied diet.

Sex and class distinction may be evident from the pottery. It is possible that the two colours either blue or red stripes were used to ensure the larger portions of food were given to the men. Class distinction was more evident in the finds from the Royal Edinburgh Asylum established in 1809. Prior to 1842, when a pauper wing was built at the asylum, the patients were all fee-paying. This is reflected in the number of sherds from high status pottery with gold edging which include sherds of bathroom ware such as soap dishes and chamber pots, all with crests. Before 1887 it appears that the fee-paying patients used a full range of crockery, in a variety of patterns such as willow pattern from potteries in Glasgow and Greenock. After 1877 the pottery was made by Copeland. When the pauper wing opened in 1842

the patients there used crockery which was basic and the only implements they had were spoons. At a later stage there is evidence that the paupers were using knives and forks with a full range of a less decorated crockery similar to that found at the Poorhouse.

Some of these changes may reflect a more enlightened approach on the part of the institution to the care of both paupers and the mentally ill in the last quarter of the 19th century. Few of Jo's audience had appreciated how much information can be deduced from bits of pottery that are found everywhere and can be picked up from beaches the countryside and the garden. Every one was intrigued at this insight into post medieval pottery and showed their appreciation by warmly applauding the speaker..