

3. THE POTTERY

Valerie E Dean

3.1 Introduction

The overall impression of the assemblage was that virtually all the pottery was in the Scottish White Gritty Ware (SWGW) tradition. Five sherds were of 19th-century industrial pottery and therefore not included in this report, which will deal with 538 sherds of medieval pottery, with a total weight of 4,835 grams.

Many vessels were crudely wheelmade, although some were quite finely potted and thin-walled; from the evidence available, they did not appear to be heavily finger-rilled. Establishing the diameters and angles of rims and bases proved difficult. In part, this was due to the small size of the sherd, but was also due to the somewhat irregular rims and to knife-trimming on the lower walls of the vessels.

Few of the sherds had suffered abrasion since being broken, the original breaks remaining sharp; this did not include breaks during their recent discovery. The sherds were mostly quite small, the largest piece measuring 80mm × 70mm.

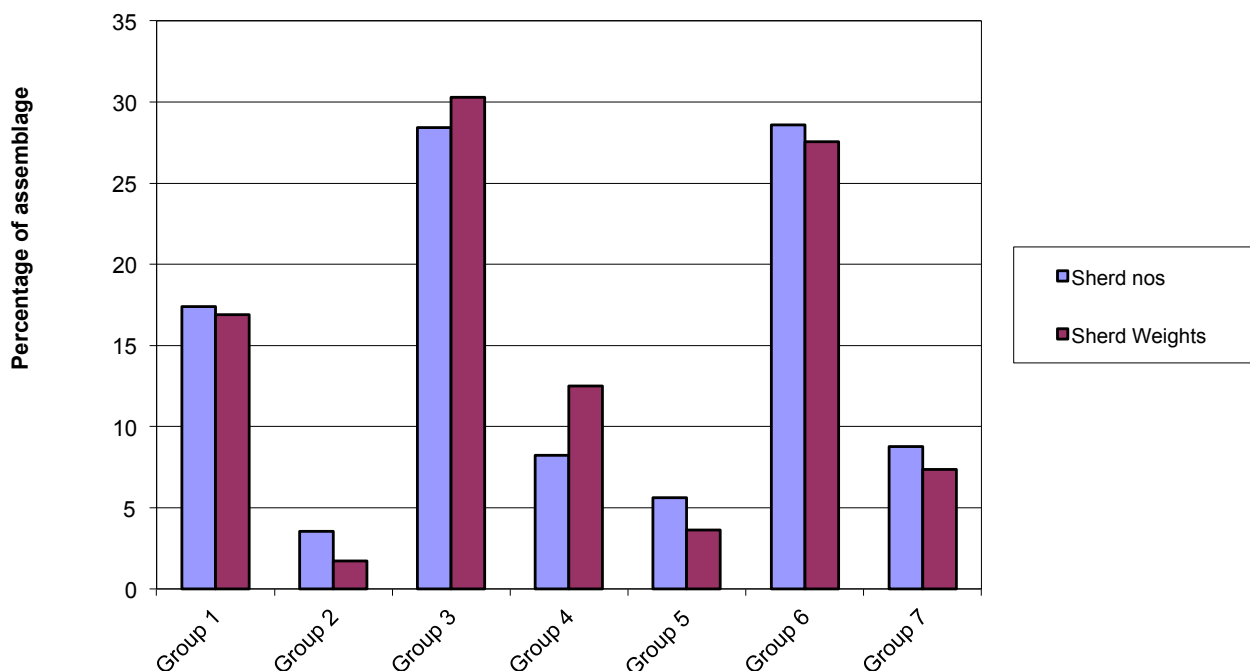
Very few joining sherds were found, due to the considerable disturbance caused immediately prior to their recovery. The degree of burning and sooting

meant that only those sherds found close together or with fresh breaks were able to be joined.

The vast majority of the sherds appeared to be cooking pots, to judge by the amount of sooting: 85% of the material was heavily sooted. However, this is not a reliable method of identification, since many of the sherds had obviously been burned after they had been broken. Not only were interiors and breaks sooted, they had been so severely burned that in some cases identification of the fabric – as white gritty or anything else – was impossible. Uneven firing and later scorching resulted in some sherds becoming completely black. Even the colour ranges given below for each group may be somewhat inaccurate if the sherds had suffered later burning or scorching. A selection of heavily sooted sherds has been set aside for future radiocarbon dating.

More than 90% of the medieval pottery examined was of the SWGW tradition, with the remainder being a pale redware (Table 1). The white gritty sherds were split into two main groups, each of which was then further divided in three. However, there were considerable variations within the groups, the principal difference being that haematite in Groups 1 to 3 is absent or very sparse, whereas in Groups 4 to 6 it was much more apparent, suggesting different production sources.

Table 1 Sherd quantities



Traces of olive green glaze were noted on 72 sherds; on 34 sherds it was smooth, shiny and even, but on the remaining 38 sherds it was often barely discernible, being spotty and frequently very abraded. The heavy sooting may well have concealed further traces of glaze. It was impossible to ascertain the coverage as it varied from sparse spots anywhere between the rims and bases to the shiny, even coating on a very few body sherds. Many of the surfaces had been wiped, and creamy slip was present on a few redware sherds. A few sherds had been decorated by scoring with a sharp-pointed implement or with a comb.

3.2 Group 1: Scottish White Gritty Ware (Illus 7, Cat nos 1–10)

These 93 sherds, weighing 818 grams, are 2–10mm thick, have an irregular, hackly, laminated, voided and pockmarked texture and are fairly hard, with a harsh feel and rough fracture. The 30% inclusions comprise abundant, very poorly sorted, very fine to very coarse (grains up to 5mm), sub-angular, translucent quartz; sparse, poorly sorted, medium, sub-angular, black rock; very sparse, very poorly sorted, fine to coarse, angular ?slate; very sparse, poorly sorted, medium, rounded haematite; and very sparse mica. The outer surface varies from 10YR 7/4 very pale brown to 8/2 white. The interior varies from 7.5YR 7/2 pinkish-grey to 10YR 4/1 dark grey to 7/1 light grey to 8/4 very pale brown. The core goes from 7.5YR 4/1 dark grey to 10YR 8/2 white to 2.5Y 3/0 very dark grey. Several sherds are glazed, and the colour varies from 2.5Y 4/4 olive brown to 5Y 5/3 olive; it can be shiny, patchy or abraded.

3.3 Group 2: Scottish White Gritty Ware (Illus 7, Cat nos 11–13)

These 19 sherds, weighing 84 grams, are 2–6mm thick, have a fine texture and are fairly hard, with a slightly rough feel and fracture. The 20% inclusions comprise abundant, well sorted, fine, sub-angular, translucent quartz; sparse, well sorted, fine, rounded, black rock; and very sparse mica. The outer surface varies from 10YR 6/3 pale brown to 8/3 very pale brown. The interior is 10YR 7/3 very pale brown to 8/2 white, and the core is 10YR 5/1 grey to 8/2 white. One of the sherds has tiny flecks of olive glaze on the rim.

3.4 Group 3: Scottish White Gritty Ware (Illus 8, Cat nos 14–32)

The 152 sherds, weighing 1,465 grams, are 3–10mm thick, have a smooth texture which is occasionally slightly laminated or voided, is fairly hard, with a rough feel and fracture. The 10–15% inclusions comprise a moderate amount of very poorly sorted, very fine to coarse, sub-angular, translucent quartz; a moderate amount of very poorly sorted, fine to very coarse (5mm), well rounded and sub-angular, black and grey rock; very occasional, very well sorted, very fine, rounded haematite; and very occasional mica. The outer surface is 10YR 7/3 very pale brown, the interior ranges from 7.5YR 7/4 pink to 10YR 8/2 white to 8/3 very pale brown; the core is 7.5YR 6/4 pink to 10YR 8/2 white. Several of the sherds are glazed, ranging from 5Y 4/3 olive to 10YR 3/3 blackish brown to 4/6 dark yellowish brown to 5/4 yellowish brown; it tends to be even, but glossy or abraded.

3.5 Group 4: Scottish White Gritty Ware (Illus 8, Cat nos 33–36)

The 44 sherds, weighing 604 grams, are 3–10mm thick, have a hackly, irregular, laminated, voided or pock-marked texture and are fairly hard, with a harsh feel and rough to very rough texture. The 10–20% inclusions comprise abundant, very poorly sorted, very coarse, sub-angular, translucent quartz; moderate amounts of very poorly sorted, fine to very coarse, rounded haematite and red and grey rock; and very sparse mica. The outer surface is 7.5YR 7/4 pink to 10YR 7/3–8/3 very pale brown. The inner surface is 10YR 7/3 very pale brown to 8/2 white to 8/3 very pale brown. The core is 7.5YR 7/4 pink to 10YR 8/2 white to 2.5Y 4/0 dark grey. A few sherds have glaze, which varies from 10YR 4/4 dark yellowish brown to 5/4 yellowish brown to 2.5Y 5/4 light olive brown; it is even and shiny.

3.6 Group 5: Scottish White Gritty Ware (Illus 8, Cat no. 37)

The 30 sherds, weighing 176 grams, are 3–5mm thick, have a smooth, fairly hard texture, a slightly rough feel and a rough fracture. The 5–10% inclusions comprise fairly sparse, very poorly sorted, fine to very coarse (3mm), sub-angular, translucent

quartz; a moderate amount of very poorly sorted, fine to very coarse (3mm), rounded haematite; fairly sparse, very poorly sorted, fine to coarse, rounded, black, grey or red rock; and a moderate amount of mica. The outer surface is 10YR 8/3 very pale brown. The inner surface and core are 10YR 8/1 white to 8/3 very pale brown. One of the sherds has spots of glaze which is 10YR 4/4 dark yellowish brown.

3.7 Group 6: Scottish White Gritty Ware (Illus 9, Cat nos 38–52)

The 153 sherds, weighing 1332 grams, are 2–10mm thick and have a fairly smooth, occasionally laminated, fairly hard texture, with a slightly rough feel and rough fracture. The 10% inclusions comprise a moderate amount of very poorly sorted, fine to very coarse (3mm), sub-angular, translucent quartz; a moderate amount of very poorly sorted, fine to very coarse (3mm), rounded haematite; a moderate amount of very poorly sorted, fine to very coarse (5mm), rounded and occasionally sub-angular, black or red rock; and a moderate amount of mica. The outer surface is 7.5YR 7/4–8/4 pink to 10YR 7/3 very pale brown to 8/2 white; occasionally there is a surface skin 5YR 6/4 light reddish brown. The inner surface is 7.5YR 8/2 pinkish-white to 8/4 pink to 10YR 6/1 grey to 8/1 white to 8/2 very pale brown. The core is 7.5YR 4/0 dark grey to 10YR 5/1 grey to 8/3 very pale grey. Several sherds are glazed, and this varies from 10YR 4/6 dark yellowish brown to 2.5Y 5/4–5/6 light olive brown to 5Y 5/3 olive; it is generally even and shiny, but can be abraded.

3.8 Group 7: Redware (Illus 9, Cat nos 53–59)

These 47 sherds, weighing 356 grams, are 3–10mm thick, have a fairly smooth, occasionally slightly laminated, fairly hard texture, sometimes with grass voids. It has a slightly rough feel and rough fracture. The 20% inclusions comprise a moderate amount of very poorly sorted, fine to very coarse, sub-angular translucent and white quartz; abundant, very poorly sorted, fine to very coarse (3mm), rounded haematite; a moderate amount of very poorly sorted, fine to very coarse (4mm), rounded, black, red and occasionally white rock; and a moderate amount of mica. The outer surface is 7.5YR 7/4 pink. The inner

surface is 7.5YR 6/4–8/4 light brown to pink. The core is 7.5YR 6/4–7/4 light brown to pink. Several sherds are glazed, and this varies from 7.5YR 5/4 brown to 2.5Y 5/6 light olive brown; it is generally even and shiny, but occasionally occurs as spots. A few sherds show traces of slip, 7.5YR 8/2 pinkish white or 5YR 8/3 pink.

3.9 Catalogue of illustrated pottery

► Fabric 1 (Illus 7)

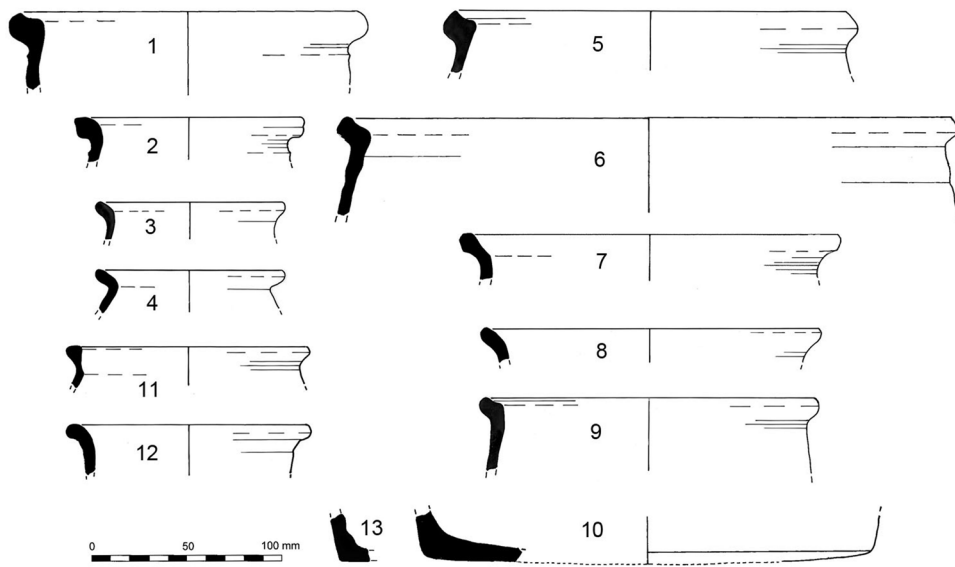
- 1 Jar or cooking pot.
- 2 Small cooking pot? Heavily sooted.
- 3 Small cooking pot? Tiny spot of glaze on rim.
- 4 Small cooking pot?
- 5 Jar or cooking pot. Tiny spots of glaze below rim.
- 6 Large jar.
- 7 Jar or cooking pot.
- 8 Jar or cooking pot? Traces of glaze on underside of rim.
- 9 Jar or cooking pot.
- 10 Jar or cooking pot. Large patch of glaze on base.

► Fabric 2 (Illus 7)

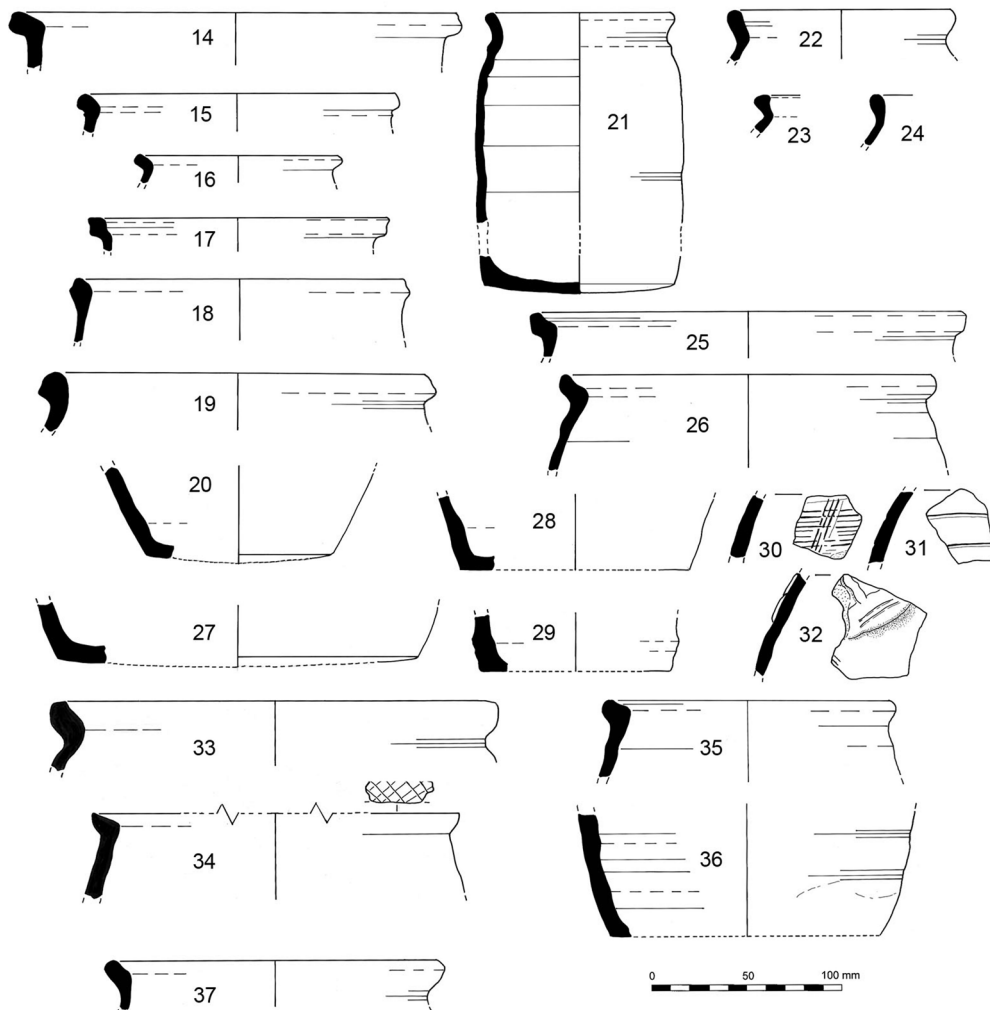
- 11 Small cooking pot?
- 12 Small cooking pot? Glaze spot on rim. Heavily sooted.
- 13 Base of small cooking pot? Trace of possible wire marks.

► Fabric 3 (Illus 8)

- 14 Jar or cooking pot.
- 15 Jar or cooking pot.
- 16 Small jar or cooking pot.
- 17 Jar or cooking pot.
- 18 Jar or cooking pot. Heavily sooted.
- 19 Jar or cooking pot.
- 20 Cooking pot?
- 21 Cylindrical jar.
- 22 Jar or cooking pot.
- 23 Jar or cooking pot. Glaze spot below rim.
- 24 Jar or cooking pot. (Grey ware.)
- 25 Jar or cooking pot. Splash of degraded glaze below rim.
- 26 Rounded jar or cooking pot.
- 27 Cooking pot? Glaze spots on base.
- 28 Cooking pot? Heavily sooted.
- 29 Jar or cooking pot.



Illus 7 Fabric groups 1 and 2



Illus 8 Fabric groups 3, 4 and 5

- 30 Jug? Body sherd with horizontal and diagonal combed decoration. Shiny, even glaze.
- 31 Jug? Body sherd with horizontal scored decoration. Traces of very pale yellow-green glaze in the scores.
- 32 Jug? Body sherd with trace of applied decoration. Shiny, even glaze.

► **Fabric 4 (Illus 8)**

- 33 Rounded jar or cooking pot.
- 34 Jar or cooking pot with criss-cross scored decoration on rim top. Heavily sooted.
- 35 Jar or cooking pot.
- 36 Rounded jug or jar. Thin, matt, even glaze on exterior.

► **Fabric 5 (Illus 8)**

- 37 Jar or cooking pot.

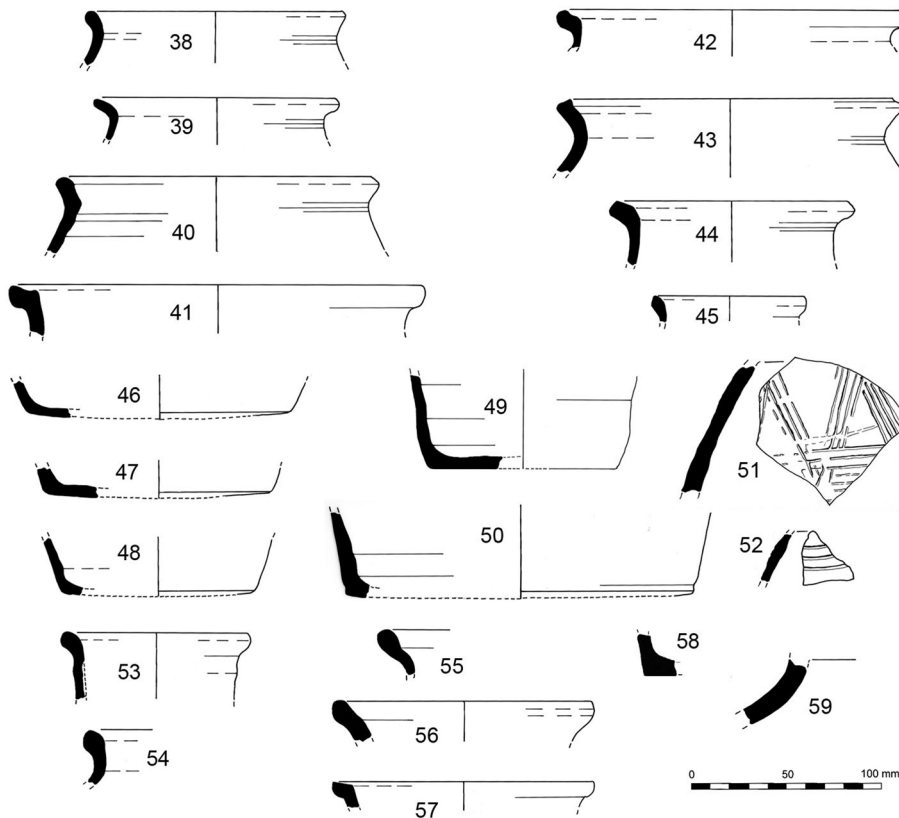
► **Fabric 6 (Illus 9)**

- 38 Jar or cooking pot.
- 39 Jar or cooking pot.

- 40 Rounded jar or cooking pot. Glaze spots on exterior.
- 41 Jar or cooking pot. Spot of glaze on exterior.
- 42 Jar or cooking pot.
- 43 Rounded jar or cooking pot.
- 44 Jar or cooking pot.
- 45 Small jar or cooking pot.
- 46 Jar or cooking pot.
- 47 Jar or cooking pot.
- 48 Jar or cooking pot.
- 49 Jar or cooking pot.
- 50 Jar or cooking pot.
- 51 Large jug? Body sherd with criss-cross combed decoration. Shiny, even glaze on exterior.
- 52 Jug or jar. Body sherd with horizontal grooved decoration.

► **Fabric 7 (Illus 9)**

- 53 Jug or jar. Tiny glaze speck on exterior.
- 54 Jar or cooking pot. Spots of glaze on exterior.
- 55 Jar or cooking pot. Slip on interior.
- 56 Small jar or cooking pot.



Illus 9 Fabric groups 6 and 7

- 57 Small jar or cooking pot. Very slight traces of external glaze.
- 58 Jar or cooking pot. Basal sherd with spots of shiny glaze on exterior.
- 59 Large jug? Shoulder sherd with abraded, shiny, external glaze.

3.10 Discussion

White gritty pottery was in widespread use across Scotland from the 12th to 15th centuries, suggesting that there were many production centres. However, the only one to be positively identified is at Colstoun, near Haddington in East Lothian (Brooks 1981; Hall 2007). More recently, signs of other sites have been noticed in Fife, but these have yet to be investigated, and others are suspected in the Lothians and Fife (Jones et al 2006).

From the limited vessel forms available and the amount of sooting it appears that most of these are cooking pots, typical of the 12th and 13th centuries, such as the straight-sided, flat-bottomed vessel (Illus 8, no. 21), which is similar to those from the 12th-century Pit BY at Kelso Abbey (Cox et al 1985: 381–98). There is a small portion of a flared spout (not illustrated), probably from a jug of similar date (Jones et al 2006: 55: type 12). A rim (Illus 8, no. 34), whose upper surface bears cross-hatched decoration, resembles a rim from Kelso phase 1 drain BT (Cox et al 1985: 389: illus 21, no. 51). Those cooking pots with more rounded bodies are likely to be of a slightly later date, perhaps into the 13th or 14th centuries (Jones et al 2006: 47).

It is possible that white gritty pottery cooking pots normally had a short life, since it would have been difficult to clean food residues from the interior; if left, these would have tainted future contents. By their very nature, these pots must have suffered

when subjected to the wear and tear of heating over an open fire, which may account for the considerable number of sherds with sooting on the interior and on broken edges.

If the site was one that could be considered to be affluent, or within easy reach of a production centre or clay source, then such vessels might have been treated as being disposable. If, as Derek Hall suggests (Hall 2006: 204), the lead mines at Siller Holes were under the ownership of the Cistercian monks of Newbattle from the 12th century, then it is possible that they also established a pottery industry to supply the workforce.

On the other hand, the high degree of sooting on the Siller Holes vessels might suggest considerable reuse, implying that the local economy or the lack of availability demanded that care be taken to prolong their lives.

Redwares seem to have appeared a little later, in the mid-13th century, and are most commonly found along the east coast of Scotland (Hall 1998). This orange-brown fabric initially contained quantities of quartz but, as firing methods improved and metal was being increasingly used for cooking pots, the gritting became less important. An olive green glaze was often used. Kilns at Rattray, Aberdeenshire, produced redwares from the 13th to the early 15th centuries (Murray 1993: 148–69).

It is interesting that the dating of the leather footwear (see Section 8 below) corroborates these early dates, since the pottery was found in close association with the remains of shoes of the 12th to 13th centuries.

With the exception of a few sherds of 18th- or 19th-century industrial pottery, none of the assemblage could be dated to later than the 14th to 15th centuries.