

Medieval Pottery in Dundee Museum

by Lloyd R. Laing

Dundee Burgh Museum possesses an important collection of Scottish medieval pottery, most of which was found in Dundee itself during the first phases of the Overgate development in the period 1961-2. Apart from this considerable collection there is also in the reserve collections a small group of sherds from Tentsmuir, Fife, and a few insignificant and weathered sherds from St Andrews. This paper is primarily concerned with the Dundee Overgate pottery and its implications, but it has been thought useful to include the Tentsmuir pottery as it is fairly typical of the early medieval pottery found in Fife as a whole.

Tentsmuir (fig 1)

The dunes at Tentsmuir, like Luce Sands in Galloway and Culbin Sands in Moray, are well known to archaeologists for their prolific yield of material culture ranging from the third millennium BC and earlier to the end of the medieval period. A map of the Tentsmuir area of Fife has been published by Longworth, along with an account of the Neolithic and later prehistoric pottery from the area.¹ The whole of the Tentsmuir region (including Tentsmuir Forest), an area approximately six miles by three, has yielded medieval pottery, and there is good reason to suppose that there were kilns in the area in the fourteenth century – I have already suggested elsewhere the

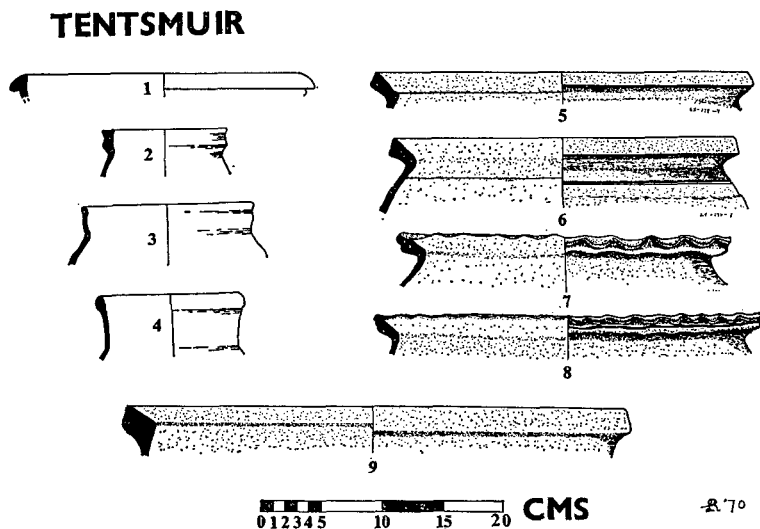


FIG 1

possibility of a medieval pottery industry in the region of neighbouring Leuchars.² The National Museum of Scotland has a considerable collection of medieval pottery from this NE corner of Fife, mainly, but by no means entirely, collected by Mr Daniel Henderson in recent years.

The group of vessels here illustrated consists of cooking pot and jug sherds, together with one Roman rim. They are illustrated in fig 1.

1. Rim of dish in fine sandy grey ware, with orangey burnished surface and traces of fuming. Compare *Mumrills*, 41 (where dated to probably AD 170–185) or *Gillam*, Types 310–11. The rim can also be paralleled from Rough Castle. A date in the second half of the second century seems likely.

2. Jug rim in hard orange friable ware. No glaze. Squared upright rim, slightly hollowed. The rim form is related to Type 2 at *Scarborough*, and is widespread in Northern Britain. It probably first occurs in the early thirteenth century, but almost certainly continued into the fourteenth. It is represented among the products of the Perth kiln (*Perth*, fig 16, 3), and variants occur at *Kirkcudbright*, 16, (dated to 1288–1307) and *Jedburgh* (*SMP*, 4).

3. Slightly S-profiled jug rim in light creamy orange sandy ware with spots of light green and honey coloured glaze. This is the most characteristic jug profile in Scotland. It probably first appears at the end of the thirteenth century (cf *Bothwell*, 55 or *Bothwell*, 4) but continues into the fourteenth at least. For a fourteenth-century parallel, see *Linlithgow I*, 23.

4. Upright jug rim with thickened lip. Hard light grey ware, fired to orange on the exterior. Spots of light green glaze. This simple type of rim probably enjoyed a long currency – it first appears again on vessels of the thirteenth/fourteenth century (e.g. *Scarborough*, Types 4, 6, 8 and 13) and is present among the earliest material at Carlisle where it is assigned to the thirteenth century (*Carlisle II*, 2) – it also appears in Scotland on jugs of fifteenth-century date, such as *Bothwell*, 22 or 23. Here fabric and glaze would suggest a fourteenth-century date.

5–6. Cooking pot rims in creamy white ware with pimply surface due to small quartz grits. No. 6 has a light grey core and is fumed on the exterior. Both are typical of the late thirteenth/fourteenth century. No. 6 can be compared with the *Upper Heaton* kiln material (fig 18, nos 4 and 12), dated to the early fourteenth century. While both types are typical of the East coast from Yorkshire to Angus, they do not often seem to occur in the West – they cannot be paralleled from Carlisle, from the pottery in Dumfries Museum, nor even from Linlithgow, though there are a few closely related types from Glenluce.

7. Cooking pot in orange/creamy ware, with medium grits, fumed on exterior. Everted, slightly bifid rim, with thumbing along the top. This pot, and the more elaborate development represented by no. 8, are a good example of a type of fourteenth-century Scottish cooking pot which seems to be an exclusively Scottish development. The prototype however can probably be seen in *Tynemouth Priory*, 39 or *Scarborough*, 52.

I know of no identical rims from Northern England, though the main elements, the bifid rim and thumbing, both occur S of the border. Compare *Upper Heaton*, fig 18, nos 5–7 or *Shilmoor*, 89 and 97. In Scotland the types are particularly common in Fife and Angus, but occur elsewhere on the East Coast.

8. Cooking pot rim in similar ware to no. 7, with a spot of light green glaze on the rim. This is of everted bifid form, with thumbing along upper and lower edges.

9. Very large cooking pot (aper. diam. 16 in) with club rim of diamond section. Similar to *Upper Heaton*, fig 18, 8 (early fourteenth century). See also *Scarborough*, Type 39 (mainly late thirteenth century but continuing into the fourteenth).

Nos 5–9 are in what I have termed ‘Leuchars’ ware.

With the exception of no. 1 all the Tentsmuir sherds are in keeping with a date in the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century. It is unknown whether they are in any way a ‘group’ or are stray finds from isolated locations – they were from the same collection. On external evidence they could quite easily be taken as a typical group for the period and area.

Dundee Overgate (figs 2–3)

The medieval pottery from Dundee Overgate was recovered during the first phases of the Overgate Development in 1961–2 by Mr Daniel C Henderson, from what appears to have been a

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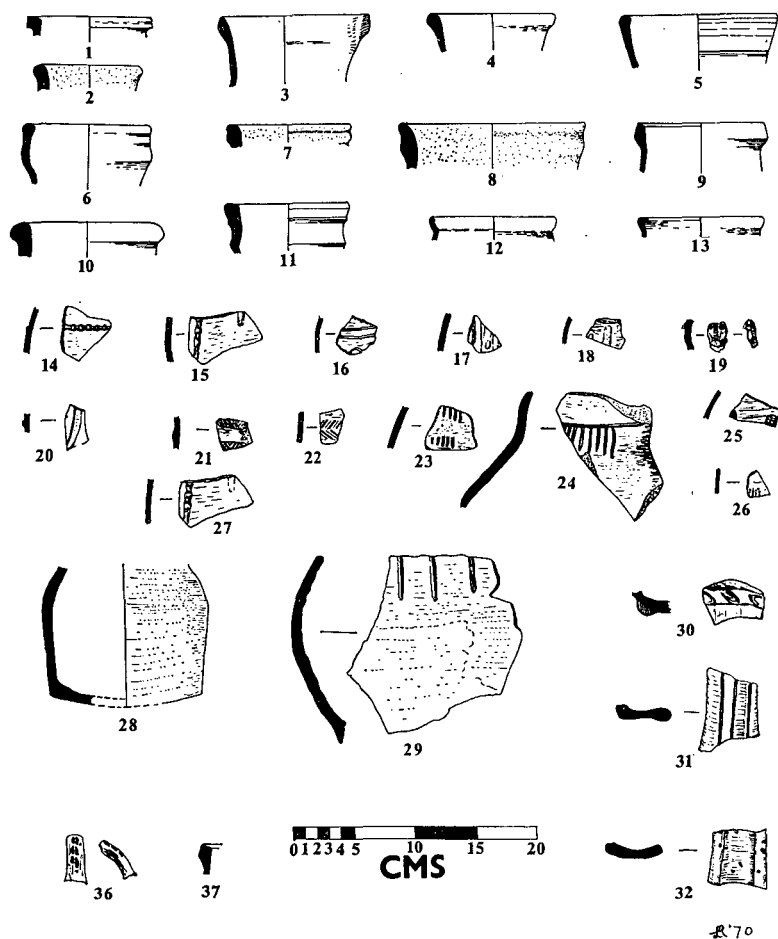


FIG 2

series of middens. Unfortunately no grouping of the material was noted – the circumstances of discovery made this virtually impossible – and the finds have had to be dated on external evidence. The material from the middens consists of over 2,100 sherds together with fragments of fourteenth-century leather shoes, fragments of worked wood, kiln material and small finds of bronze, lead and stone. There was also a certain amount of metal waste suggesting that metalworking, probably bronze casting, was carried out on the site.

There is reason to suppose that the period in which the Overgate middens were accumulating did not extend into the post-medieval period. The bulk of the pottery belongs to the period from the end of the thirteenth century down to the middle or end of the fourteenth. Pottery that is certainly later is very small in quantity, and could in fact be derived from only a few vessels, perhaps the content of a single pit. Admittedly there is at present the difficulty in Scotland of assigning material to the period from the end of the fourteenth century to the sixteenth century, a difficulty made more obvious by the fact we now know that light-coloured fabrics and glazes and

certain basic decorative details (such as applied 'Bovril' coloured strips and probably even face masks) continued as late as the middle of the fifteenth century and may even have continued until the beginning of the sixteenth. Nevertheless, in any group of pottery of the period after *c* 1450 there is usually a fair proportion of sherds in the fine hard grey ware with good green or green-brown lustrous glaze that is typical of Scottish late medieval and post-medieval pottery. Very little of this is present in the Overgate. Secondly, any collection of pottery of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries almost invariably includes some stoneware (especially sherds of German and English bellarmines), and towards the end of the seventeenth century various types of Delft. With the exception of one frilled base of Sieberg Ware (and therefore datable to *c* 1500), these later wares are totally absent. Also absent are the clay pipes, so prolific on seventeenth- or eighteenth-century sites, and definitive small finds of these centuries. Among the small finds there are a few which are probably eighteenth and a few nineteenth century, but no more than one would expect from any urban site. Therefore, unless there has been artificial selection of the material (and of course it is always unwise to argue *ex silentio*), it can be said that the Overgate middens were falling out of use in the late fourteenth century. Among the latest material from the site are two or three sherds of what seem to be Tudor English vessels – they are in fine white ware with a bright green glaze. Such wares are rare in North Britain, but not unknown – see for example the finds from Hungate, York.³

As far as an initial date for the Dundee pottery is concerned, the earliest likely date is the second half of the thirteenth century. With the exception of a few imports,⁴ there is no evidence at present for the use of pottery to any extent in Eastern Scotland before this date. The Scottish medieval pottery industry was probably largely a development following the Edwardian campaigns, when a considerable amount of pottery no doubt came into Scotland with the English army.

The general character of the Overgate pottery is extremely varied and of high quality. There is evidence of kiln activity on the site; this takes the form of kiln bricks – glazed blocks that have been fired at considerable temperature (pl 18), a fragment of clay with wattle impressions probably from the lining of the kiln dome, a possible kiln prop and some wasters.

The wasters are rims of jugs similar to no. 13 in the list. There are a very large number of body sherds with impressed cordons in the same fabric and glaze (of which nos 14–15 are typical) and these are also probably from Dundee jugs. It is noteworthy that while most are glazed there are a large number which are unglazed or partially glazed. A few are glazed light green, the colour of the glaze on the kiln bricks. Jugs in this ware and fabric have been noted on a number of sites in Fife and Angus among the material in the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh.

The possibility that a type of Scarborough ware was being produced in Dundee cannot be ruled out – one of the Scarborough ware sherds, a base (published by Coutts in his note on the Scarborough Ware from the Overgate),⁵ has a stacking-ring mark on the base – such vessels were generally not traded far afield. Many of the Overgate unglazed sherds are in a 'Scarborough-like' fabric, and there are in fact in the Overgate collection over 30 sherds of what would appear to be Scarborough Ware, representing 15–20 vessels. The question of Scarborough Ware in Scotland has been taken up elsewhere – it is sufficient to note here that there is now a disproportionate amount recorded from Scotland.⁶

There is a considerable variety in the fabrics encountered in the Overgate. Particularly common is a gritty light-coloured ware ranging in shade from white to cream and light grey. This is related to 'Leuchars' ware. It was particularly commonly used for jugs (in contrast to Northern England) but was also used for a few cooking pots.

A second distinctive ware is of 'eggshell' fineness, white and unglazed or sometimes with

spots of glaze. Between the 'Leuchars' wares and the 'eggshell' ware there is a variety of intermediate fabrics, all light coloured but varying in the amount of grits used.

Another category of wares are in hard sandy-buff fabric, some with an orange-red slip. These are probably relatively late. Some 'Leuchars' fabric vessels have an orange slip – a feature noted at other sites.

In smaller quantities are grey sandy wares, late hard grey wares, and grey fumed black wares.

Some sherds show signs of having been subjected to considerable heat after firing.

Glazes occur in all colours from clear and pale yellow to red and metallic or bovril-coloured.

The commonest forms of decoration are applied rouletted bands, plain applied strips, scales and single applied blobs.

The assemblage as a whole shows a combination of influences. Apart from the imports from Yorkshire there is a marked similarity between many of the forms represented and those produced

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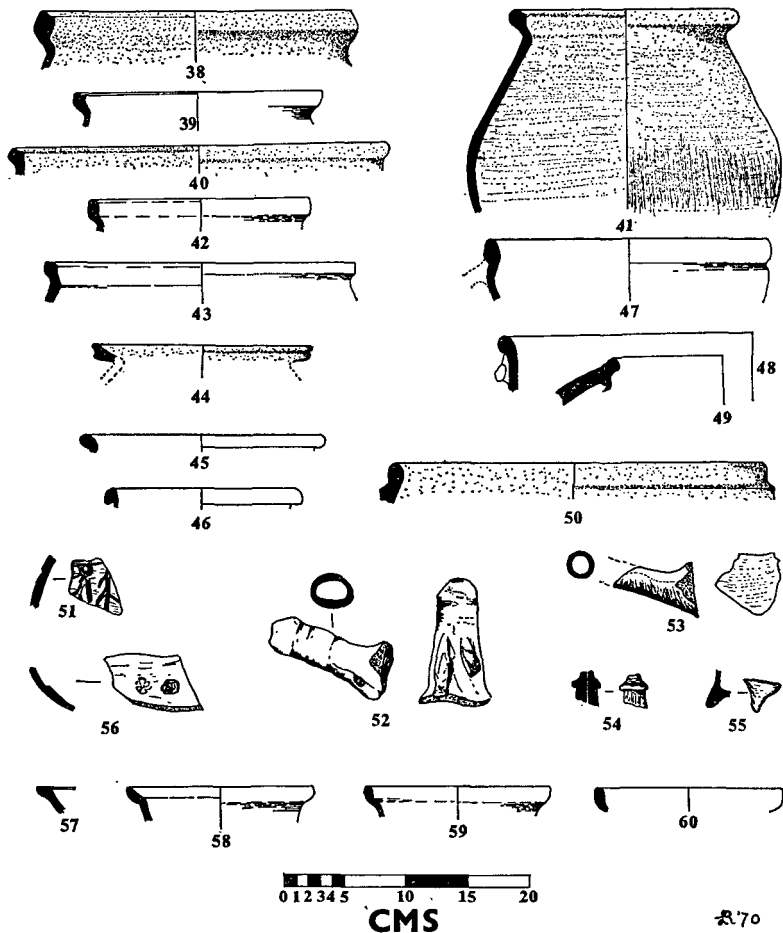


FIG 3

in the early fourteenth-century kilns at Upper Heaton in the West Riding.⁷ There are indeed closer parallels between the material from Dundee and Yorkshire medieval pottery than there are between Dundee and the pottery from Northumberland and Durham. This is true to some extent of much of the pottery from Angus and Fife, suggesting perhaps that the East Coast pottery industry was influenced in the early fourteenth century by imports traded up the coast from Yorkshire. The products of the Colstoun kilns in East Lothian also show Yorkshire influence. Imports from other areas include possible vessels from the Northumberland–Durham area and less certainly from the Midlands. Such a mixture is not surprising from Dundee, which was an important port in the Middle Ages. Most of the pottery however is probably local, and includes some very unusual or unique types not readily paralleled.

Jugs

1. Jug rim in sandy buff to orange ware, with a light honey-coloured glaze. The rim section is upright and squared. Both fabric and glaze are of a closely related type to Scarborough Ware, and the form closely related to *Scarborough*, 12/1. The form is also represented at *Upper Heaton*, fig 9, 14, and is also present in the Perth kilns.

2. Upright jug rim with slightly swollen lip. Gritty white hard ware – ‘Leuchars’ fabric. Compare *Bothwell*, 25 (early fourteenth century).

3. Jug rim with simple spout in creamy white ware with spots of honey and light green glaze. Slightly swollen rim. Again a simple form which could belong to the fourteenth or even fifteenth century – the fabric, which is hard, and the good quality but sparse glaze might indicate an earlier rather than a later date. Compare Deer Abbey, 42 (*SMP*, 42) or *Carlisle II*, 19 (where dated to c 1250).

4. Jug rim of similar profile but smaller diameter in light brown, very gritty ware with a drip of brown glaze. Probably fourteenth century. Fabric and form are both represented from surface finds in Angus and Fife.

5. Jug rim in hard buff fabric with spit of dirty yellow glaze. Upright rim with very slightly thickened lip. *Scarborough*, 13.

6. Jug rim in hard sandy grey ware with buff exterior. Dirty green glaze on shoulder. Thickened lip with swelling on neck. This is a very common Scottish type – cf *Linlithgow I*, 23 (fourteenth century) or *Bothwell*, 4, also *Melrose*, 2.

7. Rim of jug in gritty white ‘Leuchars’ fabric. Upright thickened rim with slightly bifid profile. For a grooved rim of late thirteenth/fourteenth-century date see *Finchale*, 20. See also *Scarborough*, 12/1 – where the rim is, however, squared.

8. Rim of large jug in white sandy fabric with thickened profile below the lip. *Newcastle S Curtain Wall*, 81.

9. Jug rim in hard white/pink ware, with spot of yellow glaze on rim. Rim angular and slightly thickened, with an internal chamfer. *Upper Heaton*, fig 8, 1. (Early fourteenth century.)

10. Jug rim in hard pinky-buff ware. Slightly beaded rim. Cf Deer Abbey, 45 (*SMP*, 45). *Carlisle II*, 91 (thirteenth century).

11. Rim of jug in orange-buff sandy ware with slightly thickened lip with swelling below and slight cordon. Streaks of honey and green glaze. While the fabric appears to be fourteenth century, the form seems later.

12. Rim of jug in hard fine buff ware with no glaze. Slightly hollowed for lid seating. *Scarborough*, 11/1; *Perth*, fig 16, 12 etc.

13. Fine white sandy ware jug rim with pale yellow glaze. Flat-topped rim, internally thickened. Sherds in this ware and with this glaze are particularly common in the Overgate, very often with impressed cordons on the body as in nos 14–15. A few sherds of other vessels appear to have been wasters, and there is some reason to suppose that there were kilns on the site producing this ware in the early fourteenth century.

14–15. Body sherds of jugs in similar fabric and glaze with applied impressed cordons. For this type see Jedburgh, 25 (*SMP*, 25) etc.

16. Body sherd of jug in hard white gritty fabric with lightly incised lines and (?) circle. Spots of clear glaze. Compare *Melrose*, 16.

17. Body sherd of jug decorated with applied strips and pellet. Buff fabric with grey exterior and

dark green glaze. *Scarborough*, 18/1. Possibly a Yorkshire import? The same type of decoration was produced at Perth, see *Perth*, fig 16, 14.

18. Body sherd of jug in fine orange sandy ware decorated with stripes of light yellow paint. Orange glaze. Probably a Yorkshire import – painting is an Eastern English feature, mainly East Anglian, but also occurs in Yorkshire. The fabric and glaze suggest a Yorkshire provenance.

19. Small face mask in hard orange ware with white slip under a green glaze, from the upper part of a jug. The face appears to have been stamped or rather pressed from behind into a mould. An alternative interpretation of this is that it is from a spout – cf Dunning, G C, 'The Trade in Medieval Pottery around the N Sea', *Rotterdam Papers* (1968). It could be either a Nottingham or a York product – fabric and glaze are unusual for Scotland, and the face is without precise parallel among published material.

20. Body sherd in grey sandy fabric with green/brown glaze. Decorated with an applied strip. This may be the pin of a penannular brooch, of the type represented on the figure jugs from the Audlem kiln, Chester, (cf *Audlem*, 119–125). A sherd of part of a penannular brooch was found at *Kirkcudbright* – *Kirkcudbright*, 13. This could but need not necessarily be a Midland or Northern English import.

21. Body sherd of jug in hard orange ware with dark green mottled glaze. Decorated with two parallel bands of rouletted chevron decoration. This is a rare type of decoration, possibly derived from Saxo-Norman rouletting in the East Midlands, and has affinities with pottery from the low Countries. More complex varieties occur at White Castle, Monmouth (*White Castle*, II, 11); these appear to have been made in the West Midlands. The connection between the Low Countries and the English examples is not as yet understood. The Low Countries parallels (Aardenburg Ware) have been discussed recently by Dunning.⁸ Imports of Aardenburg ware are rare in Britain. For a N English related type, see *Tynemouth*, 47.

22. Body sherd of jug in light grey ware with pink exterior and olive green glaze. Decorated with stamped herringbone. Compare *Linlithgow I*, 8, but here the jug does not seem to have been pressed into the stamp from behind.

23. Body sherd of jug in hard orange ware, fired to grey outside, with green-brown glaze. Decorated with incised lines, as 24.

24. Body sherd of jug in gritty red ware with medium grey exterior. Medium green glaze with small patches of honey colour. Decorated with incised lines.

25. Body sherd of jug in white sandy hard ware, with lustrous honey-coloured glaze and stamped decoration. For the stamp see *Jedburgh (SMP)*, 3, but here applied to pellets as opposed to the body of the vessel at Overgate. An identical sherd to the Overgate one but in orange ware has been noted from Culbin Sands, Moray.

26. Small body sherd of jug with 'raspberry' of small applied pellets. Sandy buff fabric, grey outside, with dark green lustrous glaze. Compare *Scarborough*, 24, with parallels. Fourteenth century.

27. Body sherd of jug in grey ware, dark on the inside with a light core and grey slip. Light green glaze. Decorated with applied 'Bovril'-coloured strips, one impressed with finger-tipping.

28. Base of jug in hard orange-buff ware with spots of honey and green speckled glaze. Slightly sagging base.

29. Body of jug in hard light buff ware. Medium glaze with dark green spots and streaks.

30. Base of jug, slightly sagging, with applied, thumbed strip. White gritty fabric. No glaze. This device would seem to be skeuomorphic of thumbed or pinched bases. Compare *Upper Heaton*, fig 9, 30.

31. Strap handle of jug in white sandy fabric with very pale green glaze. Decorated with two narrow grooves.

32. Strap handle of jug in gritty white ware decorated with stabbing to aid firing. Stabbing is a common feature in medieval pottery. Compare *Upper Heaton*, fig. 9, 18.

33. Rope-twist or 'barley sugar' handle in hard buff fine ware with traces of brown/green glaze. (Not illustrated).

34. Base of jug in sandy ware, grey on interior and buff on exterior, with slight sag and thumbing both underneath and on the side. (Not illustrated). Hurst Group 3. (Hurst, J G, 'Jugs with bases thumbed underneath', *Med Arch*, VI–VII (1962–3), 295–298.)

35. Fluted rod handle in grey sandy ware with orange surface. Brown glaze. (Not illustrated.) For type compare *Scarborough*, 6.

36. Small rod handle in orange buff ware with traces of brown/green glaze. Decorated with rouletted(?) incised notches.

37. Jug rim of uncertain diameter in grey ware with orange/buff exterior. Spot of light green glaze. For general type see no. 9.

Cooking pots

38. Cooking pot in hard gritty creamy ware with squared rim and internal bevel and lid seating. 'Leuchars' ware. Compare *Upper Heaton*, fig 13, 33.

39. Cooking pot in hard orange/buff sandy ware, with spots of yellow glaze on interior. Everted rim with slight lid seating and bevel. Cf *Upper Heaton*, fig 14, 8 (pancheon).

40. Cooking pot in hard light buff sandy fabric. No glaze. Upright slightly squared rim. *Upper Heaton*, fig 11, 3.

41. Cooking pot in gritty creamy ware, the exterior slightly darker and fumed below the girth. Some quartz grits up to 2 mm. Everted rounded rim. *Upper Heaton*, fig 15, 11, (jar); *Perth*, fig 16, 11; *Kidsneuk*, fig 2, 7.

42. Cooking pot in hard buff ware. No glaze. Upright rim with lid seating. *Upper Heaton*, fig 12, 1; *Perth*, fig 16, 12.

43. Cooking pot in hard orange/buff ware with cream slip. Honey-colour slip and soot stain on rim. Compare *Upper Heaton*, fig 13, 1; *Perth*, fig 16, 13; *Newcastle S Curtain Wall*, 35 (the last late thirteenth century).

44. Cooking pot with everted bifid rim in hard gritty creamy ware. Splashes of pale yellow glaze. Compare Tentsmuir, no. 7 above.

45. Bead rim cooking pot in sandy hard orange/buff ware. Compare for general type *Scarborough*, 45 or *Newcastle S Curtain Wall*, 114.

46. Cooking pot (?) rim in hard white gritty ware. Spot of very pale green glaze on rim. Compare *Linlithgow I*, 4 (late thirteenth century) or *Newcastle S Curtain Wall*, 80.

47. Handled cooking pot in hard buff sandy ware. Spot of honey-coloured glaze on handle. This may have been a two-handled vessel. The handle is placed below the rim, which is unusual for this later type of fourteenth-century cooking pot - for the general type see *Glenluce*, 12.

48. Handled cooking pot (?) in hard dark grey ware with light buff exterior. Mottled light and dark green glaze.

49. Handled cooking pot (?) in pale yellow sandy fabric, fired to white on the interior.

50. Large cooking pot in light buff gritty ware with dark grey core. Spot of honey-coloured glaze. Sharp angle immediately below the rim. This is a local rim form.

Miscellaneous

51. Jordan in hard orange ware with lustrous green-brown glaze. Decorated with incised leaf-pattern. For the form, see *Glenluce*, 7-9. The type of vessel is characteristically North British, though its distribution does extend as far as the Midlands. The decoration is unusual.

52. Tubular spout of jug modelled in the form of a phallus. Struts of applied clay underneath. Hard orange ware, with no glaze. I know of no parallels for this modelled type of spout.

53. Tubular pipkin handle. Hard orange ware, fumed on outside. Lustrous yellow-green glaze on inside. This presumably was a socket for a heat-absorbing handle. Possibly fifteenth century?

54. Knob in hard orange-pinky ware, with hole where a pin was used to attach it to the body of a vessel. This could either be from a lid or possibly from a louvre. Compare *Jedburgh*, 20 (*SMP*, 20).

55. Foot of tripod bowl in dark grey fabric, black on inside. Dirty green glaze. *Deer Abbey*, 34 (*SMP*, 34).

56. Dish in hard orange ware with yellow gritty glaze. Applied stamped 'rosettes' on interior.

57. Rim of dish in dark grey ware with orange surface.

58. Vessel of uncertain form, possibly a pipkin, in very hard slightly sandy grey-buff ware with orange slip, fumed on lip. Spot of light brown glaze on inside of lip.

59. Flared rim of vessel of uncertain form in hard sandy buff ware with spots of honey-coloured glaze.

60. Vessel of uncertain form in hard creamy white ware with grey core. No glaze.

61. Dish in hard orange ware, similar to no. 56 but undecorated and of flatter shape. (Not illustrated.)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

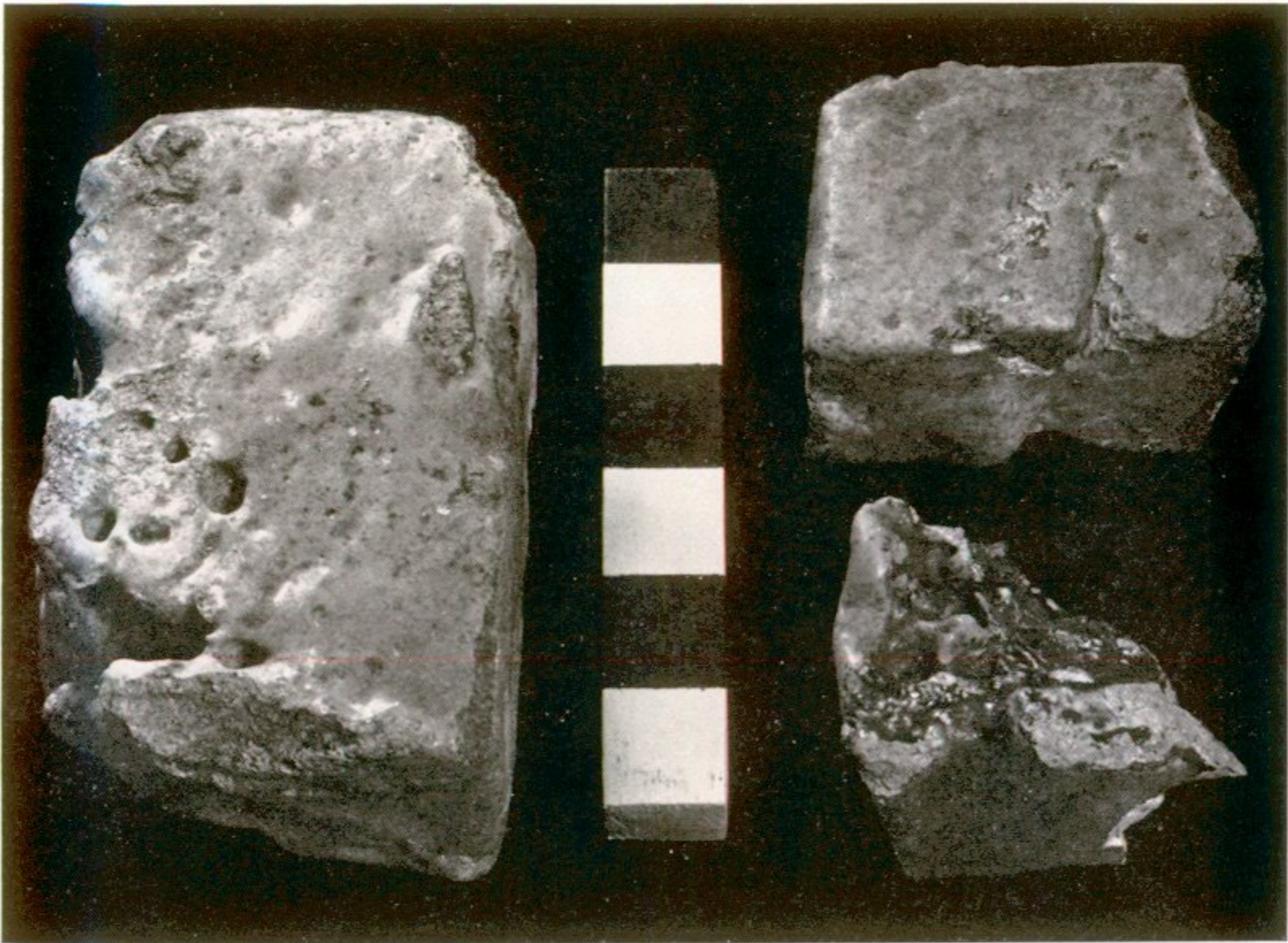
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Kiln bricks, Dundee, Overgate

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