

Medieval pottery from Coldingham Priory, Berwickshire

by Lloyd R Laing

Coldingham Priory is probably the site of the Anglian monastery known to Bede as *Urbs Coludi*. The present priory probably began its life following a grant of land to Durham at Coldingham in *c* 1098, and by 1139 or 1140 there was a regular monastery there served by monks from Durham. It was a Benedictine house, and the earliest surviving masonry on the site dates from the late twelfth–early thirteenth century.

The pottery from Coldingham is extremely varied, and in this respect is in keeping with the collections of pottery from other Scottish monastic houses. Chronologically it covers the period from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, and is notable for large numbers of sherds of imported wares. The collection is stored in the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland.

The imports include Saintonge green glazed jug sherds and fragments of stoneware costrels of the type already recognised in Scotland at Bothwell, Glenluce and Inchcolme.¹ The German imports consist of late fifteenth–early sixteenth-century sherds of Siegburg and Raeren stoneware, together with later Rhineland stoneware bellarmine jug sherds.

Significantly, there is no recognisably eleventh- or twelfth-century pottery in the assemblage, though as none of the material is stratified, on account of the long life of certain forms of cooking pot a few could belong to the twelfth century. One body sherd of coarse brown ware is possibly, but by no means certainly, a late Saxon sherd of Middle Saxon tradition of the type recognised at Whitby and more recently Monkwearmouth and Jarrow in Co. Durham.²

Apart from imported 'Scarborough' type ware, and a few sherds possibly of East Yorkshire provenance, the majority of the Coldingham pottery appears to have been produced locally. In a number of cases the material compares very closely with that from Colstoun, and it would appear that Colstoun kiln products were in use in the Priory. Products of the Colstoun kilns seem to have travelled quite far afield – a characteristic Colstoun jug was among the material from Linlithgow Palace.³ Fabrics are hard and light coloured, in general, with a preference for orange and yellows.

Although plain undecorated glazed pottery predominates, mostly conforming to the standard forms current in South-East Scotland (notably jugs with slightly swollen or squared lips and a swelling on the neck), the collection includes an unusually high percentage of elaborately decorated jug sherds. Applied scale decoration predominates at Coldingham as elsewhere in Scotland, with incised decoration also fairly popular. Applied roundels with stamped or incised concentric circles are an unusual feature of the Coldingham decorative repertoire. There is reason to suppose that vessels with this motif were produced at Colstoun, though as far as I can ascertain all the types of vessel with this motif at Coldingham are not represented at Colstoun.

Two unusual forms of vessels are worthy of special notice. The first is an inkwell (no. 11)

with perforated lug handles for suspension. Fragments of two such inkwells are present in the Coldingham collection, and they have their counterpart at Melrose (Cruden 1953, 34). The other type of vessel is extremely rare, and is a watering-pot (no. 16). This vessel has a perforated base and would have had a narrow neck and mouth which could have been covered with a thumb to prevent the water running out until the appropriate time. There is a similar vessel from London in the Guildhall Museum, which dates, as probably does the Coldingham example, to the fifteenth century.

The collection includes a series of cooking pot rims of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. These are not figured here since they have been incorporated for the most part into the drawings for a typeseries of Scottish cooking pots (Laing 1973). In all there are nearly forty different types of cooking pot rim in the Coldingham collection.

The catalogue that follows is a selective one illustrating only the most notable sherds.

THE CATALOGUE (fig 1)

- 1 Jug rim in hard grey ware with brown glaze. Thickened lip with triple rilling. This form is without parallel in Scotland.
- 2 Body sherd of jug in dark grey sandy ware with impressed scales on bovril coloured bands. Green brown glaze.
- 3 Body sherd of jug in dark grey sandy ware with white slip. Green-brown glaze with flecks of orange. Decorated with rouletted bands of square notches. This distinctive fabric and decoration is rare in Scotland. An identical sherd is recorded from an 'old house' in Kirkwall, Orkney, and is among the material lodged with IAM, Dept of the Environment. The type of rouletted decoration, which belongs to a series of rouletted vessels with different designs, may owe something to ultimately late Saxon decorative schemes. This vessel is probably thirteenth century. The motif occurs among the published material from Kirkcudbright Castle (Jope *et al* 1958, fig 5, 38), and in N England at Tynemouth (Jobey 1967, 27) and elsewhere (Jarrett and Edwards 1963, 34).
- 4 Body sherd of jug in medium grey sandy ware with white slip and olive glaze. Decorated with incised swags. Although the incised swag decoration is a feature of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century jugs in Scotland, here fabric and glaze (which are identical to no. 3) indicate a late thirteenth-century date. Cf Hartlepool (Jarrett and Edwards 1962, 29).
- 5 Body sherd of jug in hard sandy grey ware with lustrous green glaze. Decorated with raised line and applied roundels. One applied scale suggests more extensive scale decoration. This sherd, and nos 8 and 9, may come from one or similar vessels. It is difficult to determine the precise nature of the decorative scheme. The design on this sherd is presumably floral. On analogy with an unpublished sherd from Lochmaben Castle this should be fourteenth century.
- 6 Neck of jug in hard dark grey ware with yellow-brown mottled glaze. Decorated with applied scales round the neck and cordons. In spite of its unusually narrow and tall neck this is probably late thirteenth century – a parallel for the form can be seen at Hartlepool (Jarrett and Edwards 1962, 36).
- 7 Body sherd of jug decorated with incised lines and stabbing. Light hard grey ware with dull medium green glaze. For a general comparison, see Cruden 1956, 6.
- 8 Body sherd of jug in dark grey sandy ware with lustrous dark green glaze. Decorated with incised petals. Fractured strap handle (?) attachment. Both the form of the vessel and decorative scheme are curious.
- 9 Body sherd of jug in grey sandy ware with olive glaze. Decorated with applied scales.
- 10 Body sherd of jug in buff hard sandy ware with bright green glaze. Decorated with impressed 'flower' roundel.
- 11 Small two-lugged vessel in hard orange grey ware with olive green glaze. Probably an inkwell. Compare Cruden 1953, 34 or Jarrett and Edwards 1963, 103. Probably fifteenth century.
- 12 Body sherd of jug in gritty yellow ware with splashes of orange-red paint. Several sherds of this type are present at Coldingham, and the same type of red painted ware occurs at Perth c 1300 in the George Street well material (Laing 1973, 196) and in other unpublished collections from East

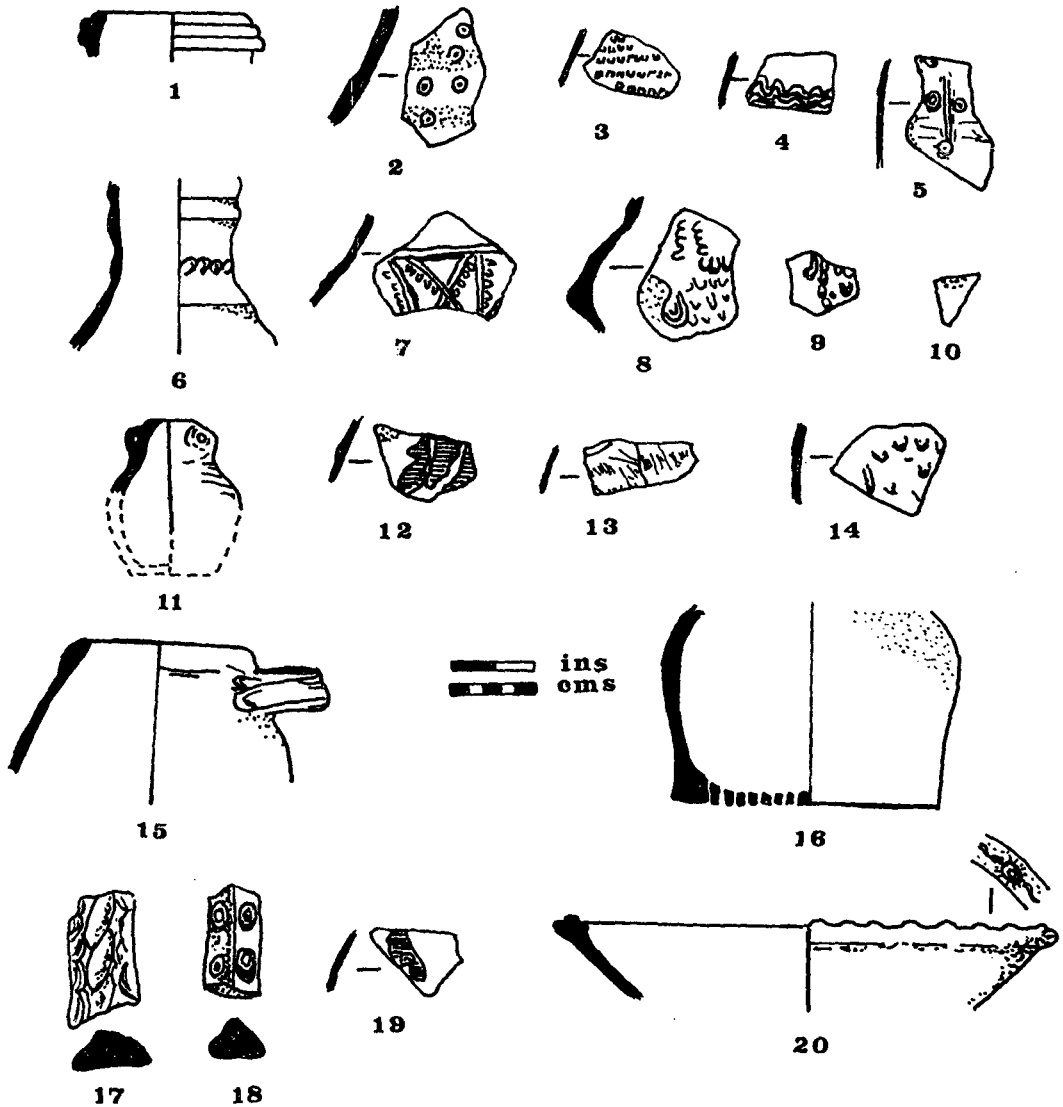


FIG 1 Pottery from Coldingham Priory

Coast sites, including Springwood, Kelso, near Old Roxburgh. Its similarity to Continental red painted ware cannot be totally fortuitous, and the fabric of this particular sherd is extremely close to that of Pingsdorf Ware. Possibly the Scottish series of red painted vessels is influenced by the French derivatives of German red painted pottery (Hurst 1969; Barton 1966, 1969).

- 13 Body sherd of jug in light grey gritty ware with greyish glaze. Decorated with irregular incised lines. For this type of decoration see Cruden 1956, 48.
- 14 Body sherd of jug in light sandy yellow ware with brown-grey glaze. Decorated with bovril stripes and petals.
- 15 Jordan or urinal in sandy buff ware with mottled green-yellow glaze. This type, with the handle to the side and wide opening at the top, is probably fourteenth century – see Cruden 1953, 28, etc.
- 16 Watering-pot with orange-green lustrous glaze in hard orange ware.

- 17 Jug handle in sandy buff ware with mottled green glaze. Decorated with applied rope-twist band and thumbing. Probably a Colstoun product.
- 18 Rod handle of triangular section in dark grey with glassy olive glaze. Bovril applied roundels on two faces.
- 19 Body sherd of jug in fine buff ware with splash of red paint and spot of yellow glaze. For type, see no. 12 above.
- 20 Dish in hard-fired orange buff ware with grey interior. Green and yellow lustrous glaze. Decorated with applied roundels of bovril colour with incised roundels and incised wavy lines, all on rim. For general type see Cruden 1953, 13, and Cruden 1952, 44.

THREE FACE MASKS

Among the Coldingham pottery is a curious sherd in identical fabric and glaze to nos 5, 8 and 9 in the above list. It is curved, and does not appear to be part of a jug of more orthodox form. It is decorated with a face with short beard, the beard being decorated with a few incised lines, the eyes are impressed roundels, the nose fractured. Two applied, fractured pads are the hands of missing arms. It is conceivable that the other sherds in similar ware are from the same vessel. (Fig 2, a)

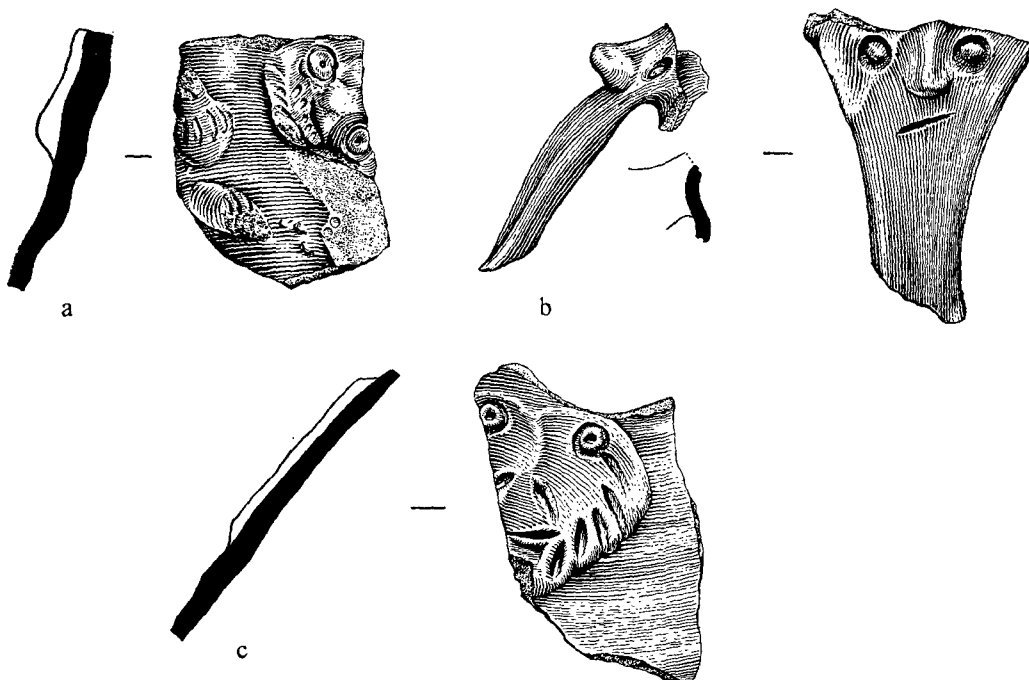


FIG 2 Face-masks: a, Coldingham; b, Stotfield, Elgin; c, Sheannawally, Fife (1:2)

Since W Norman Robertson and I published a list of Scottish medieval pottery face masks (Laing and Robertson 1970), two further examples have come to my attention. The first (fig 2, b) is of our type 1, and was found at Stotfield, Elgin. It is in the National Museum (reg. no. MEA 265), and is in a light fabric with slightly mottled green glaze. It is unusual in that the long beard joined the body of the vessel, a feature noted only on two Scottish jugs, from Bothwell and St Andrews, where the masks were of quite a different type. The Elgin mask, with impressed

eyes, well modelled nose, and slanting slit mouth, is very similar to one from near York published by Mrs le Patourel (1966), though the Elgin example lacks the incisions on the beard. It is quite possibly a Yorkshire import.

The second unpublished mask belongs to our type 3 and comes from a Rock Shelter at Sheannawally, Wee Cumbrae, Fife, according to an old ink inscription on the back. It is in the National Museum (reg. no. MEA 1925 244) and is in light grey ware with slightly weathered green glaze. The mask is a simple pad of clay applied to the body of the vessel with incised features and impressed eyes. (Fig 2, c)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks to the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland for permission to study and publish material in their possession. I also owe a special debt to Mr Tom Borthwick for drawing fig 2.

NOTES

- 1 For a discussion of these see Cruden 1952, nos 31-2. The different types of flasks have been discussed more recently by Hurst (1966). Type I is in hard earthenware and dates from the late fifteenth or sixteenth century, and probably comes from SW France; type II, in stoneware, was probably made in the early sixteenth century at Siegburg; type III, which is more globular, could have been made in Italy or even Spain. Types I and II are fairly common in Scotland - they occur for example at Glenluce, Deer, Linlithgow, Inchcolme, Inverkeillor, Invergowrie and Coupar Angus as well as at Bothwell and Coldingham.
- 2 See J G Hurst in Cramp 1969, 59-65; the Coldingham sherd is of 'Whitby' type.
- 3 Laing 1967, 131, 34; at the time it was suggested as being possibly an English import, but subsequent comparison with a jug from Colstoun shows it to match exactly.

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