

North Devon Pottery and the West Country Household, 1600–1800, John Allan

In keeping with the sub-plot to this year's Conference we had a talk by John Allan, whom many will remember from the South Devon and Exeter visit and Christopher Gilbert Lecture two years ago. The sub-plot was that of American colonial connections.

There has been continuous pottery production in the Barnstaple/Bideford area since medieval times; in fact when John mentioned a clay oven that he had found on an archaeological site during a talk that he was giving, he heard that a number of the older female members in the audience had used them until the late 1960s. Until quite recently Brannan's pottery could turn out 1200 flowerpots a day, by hand. So the tradition was long and strong.

Until the 18th century Barnstaple had made floor tiles of a distinctive form, in that they had a pattern impressed into them and we were to see some of these the next day at Tawstock St Peter; the tiles were quite small, made of a reddish clay with yellow glaze and decorated with a quadrant pattern that allowed great fluidity of arrangement. We were also to see another product of the Barnstaple potteries in a late medieval roof ridge-tile decorated with a rearing horse, still set on its original roof of the Church Rooms, in Pilton but it was not easy to see.

However, it was the Virginian connection that was perhaps the most revealing and exciting. A fragment of a yellow glazed sgraffito decorated plate or bowl was excavated in the earliest 17th-century colonial site in Virginia, which began to open up all sorts of opportunities for pottery studies. It was quite clear that there was a prodigious export trade with not only Virginia but also other early colonial sites such as Maryland, slightly further north. There was considerable evidence in and around the Barnstaple area of many potteries but little indication of who made what and where. It was the excavation led by that great 'expat' Englishman in Virginia, Ivor Noël Hume, and others that began to open up who made what and where in Barnstaple. This is a continuing story as only this year Alison Grant has produced an authoritative guide to North Devon pottery and John himself has produced a fascinating book called *West Country Households, 1500–1700* that looks, amongst other things, at the use of pottery in the home.

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