

## Notes and News

### Thomas Ball, a Staffordshire potter in early Sydney

By MARY CASEY and JENNY WINNETT

Excavations were carried out between August and September 2008 on a site at 710–22 George Street, in the Haymarket, Sydney.<sup>1</sup> From the early stages of British settlement this area was known as the Brickfields. The site was associated with Thomas Ball's Pottery between c. 1806 and 1823. Ball was known to have established his Pottery on this city block near Campbell Street, but its location was uncertain due to the permissive occupancy of land in this part of the city from 1788 until official leases were established in the early 1820s.<sup>2</sup>

Thomas Ball came from Staffordshire, where he presumably learned his trade, but moved to Warwick where he was convicted at Warwick Assizes on 27 March 1797 and sentenced to a term of seven years. He arrived in Sydney in 1799 on board the *Hillsborough*. By 1806 he had acquired a Certificate of Leave and was self-employed as a potter, probably on the excavated site in the Brickfields.<sup>3</sup> He was given a Certificate of Freedom in June 1810 by Governor Lachlan Macquarie.<sup>4</sup>

Large amounts of lead-glazed pottery were excavated from four substantial waster pits within the Pottery site. Sorting and cataloguing this material is still in progress and initial results only are outlined in this note. Preliminary analysis of the pottery suggests that Thomas Ball was imitating contemporary British ceramic types, mainly country-pottery styles, but there were also attempts to imitate finer wares such as creamware, shell-edged ware and stoneware. The Pottery was also engaged in creating experimental decorative fine tablewares with painted decoration, in addition to more recognizable plain glazed forms such as pans, dishes, and chamber pots. Many of the vessels had a pale yellow glaze, possibly a general attempt to imitate creamware (Fig. 1), as well as brown glazes in various shades and an unusual maroon colour found with incised decoration.

Decorative techniques include hand-painting in green and brown on a pale yellow background, incised lines, and rouletting. The decorative patterns consist of simple wavy lines, often in radiating patterns on the base of a plate or around the rim, intersecting lines, stylized floral motifs, and dots (Fig. 2). The hand-painted decorative styles are usually found on tablewares, plates and bowls as well as teawares.

A transported potter would largely have employed contemporary British technologies, although no kilns have been discovered in the area of the Brickfields. A slightly later example is the pottery site excavated at Irrawang, near Raymond Terrace, NSW (c. 1832–55). The site included a bottle kiln, and manufacturing processes employed included wheel-throwing and the use of moulds, all typically British.<sup>5</sup> British-style kiln furniture consisted of stilts and ring types.<sup>6</sup> Analysis of the Thomas Ball waster material, in conjunction with research into contemporary industrial activities in the Brickfields area, suggests the use of a wood-fired updraught kiln. It is hoped that future scientific analysis of the glazes and fabrics will provide more concrete evidence for the type of kiln and offer valuable information on the raw mineral sources used in glazing.

A variety of manufacturing defects were observed in Ball's waster pottery. The most common defects are related to the rapid over-firing of glazes in the kiln. Ball claimed that he was the first person in the colony producing commercial pottery and it is likely he would have been relatively unfamiliar with the local combustible materials and clays. Many vessels exhibit highly blistered and blackened glazes. Another common fault seems to have been caused by the explosion of wares in the kiln. The earthenware gravels produced by explosions



FIG. 1

George Street, Haymarket, Sydney: imitation creamware tablewares with incised decoration highlighted in green, from waster pit (photograph, Russell Workman).

then filtered down the pottery stacks, frequently collecting on the interior of bases. Stacking scars are represented by a variety of faults. These include the imprint of other vessels or kiln furniture marked in the glaze. Vessels may have smears of earthenware around rims and bases, indicating the use of more informal items of kiln furniture.

Large amounts of small, often tubular and partially flattened, hand-moulded and unglazed fired clay lumps were found in all pits. These are the remnants of informal items of kiln furniture, bobs as well as specialist kiln furniture such as stilts and spurs. There are examples of 'placing rings' and two- and four-pronged stilt-like props (Fig. 3). The absence of some classes of kiln furniture

known to have been common in earthenware kilns may be explained by the practice of reusing damaged furniture. Saggars, for example, are known to have been crushed down and mixed in with clay bodies as grog for new saggars.<sup>7</sup> The addition of grog to clay improves its thermal shock resistance. It is a possibility that such recycling practices were employed in Ball's Pottery. It is also possible that broken bases were being used in the kilns as shelving or props. Evidence for this comes from a number of thick and heavily over-fired bases recovered from the waster pits. These displayed numerous washes of multi-coloured glaze on breaks and the exterior, often in conjunction with kiln furniture scars suggestive of their being used in



FIG. 2

George Street, Haymarket, Sydney: green and brown decoration on yellow-glazed vessels, from waster pit (photograph, Russell Workman).

kiln stacking. Numerous fragments of roofing tiles were also probably used for stacking.

The pottery wasters are being incorporated into the existing type-series for locally manufactured pottery. The vessel type-series is incorporated with a series for the range of decoration. The current artefact database has been redesigned to incorporate a new set of descriptive criteria to allow a more appropriate analysis of the pottery from a manufacturing site, which generates many more questions when compared to the locally-made pottery found on domestic sites.

During the cataloguing of Ball's pottery it has already been possible to identify his wares on other sites in Parramatta (22km from Sydney) and on a

city block immediately to the east of his Pottery, where some wasters formed part of a drainage layer.<sup>8</sup> One of the easiest ways to identify Ball's products is through his decorated pottery, which is highly distinctive in contrast to the local wares usually found, with their plain lead glazes. We hope that it will be possible to expand substantially the identification of Ball's pottery on other sites in the near future.

The excavated wasters come from the oldest pottery manufacturing site so far found in Australia, and reputedly the first commercial Pottery established in the country. It is anticipated that their analysis will contribute to the expansion of our knowledge of the manufacturing process; the



FIG. 3

George Street, Haymarket, Sydney: kiln furniture, placer rings and props, from waster pit (photograph, Russell Workman).

type of goods being produced in contrast to those known to have been purchased and found on residential sites; changing patterns of production and the limitations of colonial manufacturing.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>The site was excavated by Casey & Lowe Pty Ltd.
- <sup>2</sup>Casey 1999.
- <sup>3</sup>Baxter 1989.
- <sup>4</sup>State Records of NSW, Index to Certificates of Freedom, 4/4423.
- <sup>5</sup>Birmingham 1976, 307–8.
- <sup>6</sup>Lawson 1971, 24, cited in Kelloway 2008, 18.

<sup>7</sup>Barker 1998; Barker & Horton 1999, 68.

<sup>8</sup>Casey & Lowe 2009.

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## The Hanseatic trading site at Gunnister Voe, Shetland

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From the early 15th century, ships of the Hanseatic League made their way across the North Atlantic to the Shetland Islands. Although the bare historical outlines of commerce are largely known, the details of the interaction between the merchants from northern Germany who spent three, four or five months trading fish with the Shetlanders still remain obscure.

The small trading site at Gunnister Voe, situated on the western part of Mainland Shetland, is one of the better documented sites (Fig. 4). The right to trade here was granted to one Simon Hagerskale of Hamburg in 1582, but revoked in 1603 because it was said that he had neglected his duty to sail to Gunnister regularly and to provide people with necessary items. This is evidently the same person as the Simon Harriestede mentioned in Hamburg records as sailing to Shetland.

The trading site can be identified with the place known as Hagrie's Bød in Gunnister Voe, a rocky promontory projecting into the Voe. The traditional name of the site, Hagrie's Bød, is evidently a corruption of the name of the Hamburg merchant. Immediately behind the promontory is a beach with an enclosure suitable for landing boats bringing dried fish to exchange (Fig. 4:2–3). The site was well chosen; the bay, about 1.25km long, is orientated towards the open sea, but the Isle of Gunnister in the North Sound provides excellent protection from the open sea. The Voe itself is deep enough for larger vessels.

In September 2008 excavations by the School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology of the Queen's University of Belfast and the

Roman-Germanic Commission of the German Archaeological Institute revealed the surviving two walls of the *bød* or booth (Figs 5 and 6). A *bød* was a small building, which in this case was used for the storage of goods intended for sale or which had been purchased. Unfortunately, the other part of the building has been destroyed by erosion, as well as any other possible building structures in the vicinity. Finds associated with this structure were scarce but included a few nails and fish hooks. However, deposits below the floor level contained pottery of the 18th or 19th century, suggesting that the site had continued in use or, more probably, had been reoccupied when the adjoining crofts at the Setter of Enisfirth were established. The building is shown as abandoned on the 1881 Ordnance Survey plan, although the remains were evidently clear enough for the surveyors to map them.

The excavations are part of an international research project on the operation of international trade in Iceland and Shetland (OITIS) from about 1400 to 1700. The project will examine the development, operation and impact of European trade in these two areas in the north Atlantic. In the early 15th century both were part of the Danish kingdom but, with the pledging of Shetland in 1469, it passed to the kingdom of Scotland, and led to the opening of trade to Hanse merchants. The period of trade extended in Shetland until *c.* 1700. By far the largest item of trade was stockfish (dried cod), purchased from local fishermen who operated in small vessels inshore. The northern German Hanse merchants were bringing beer, flour, salt, cloth and other necessary items in exchange.

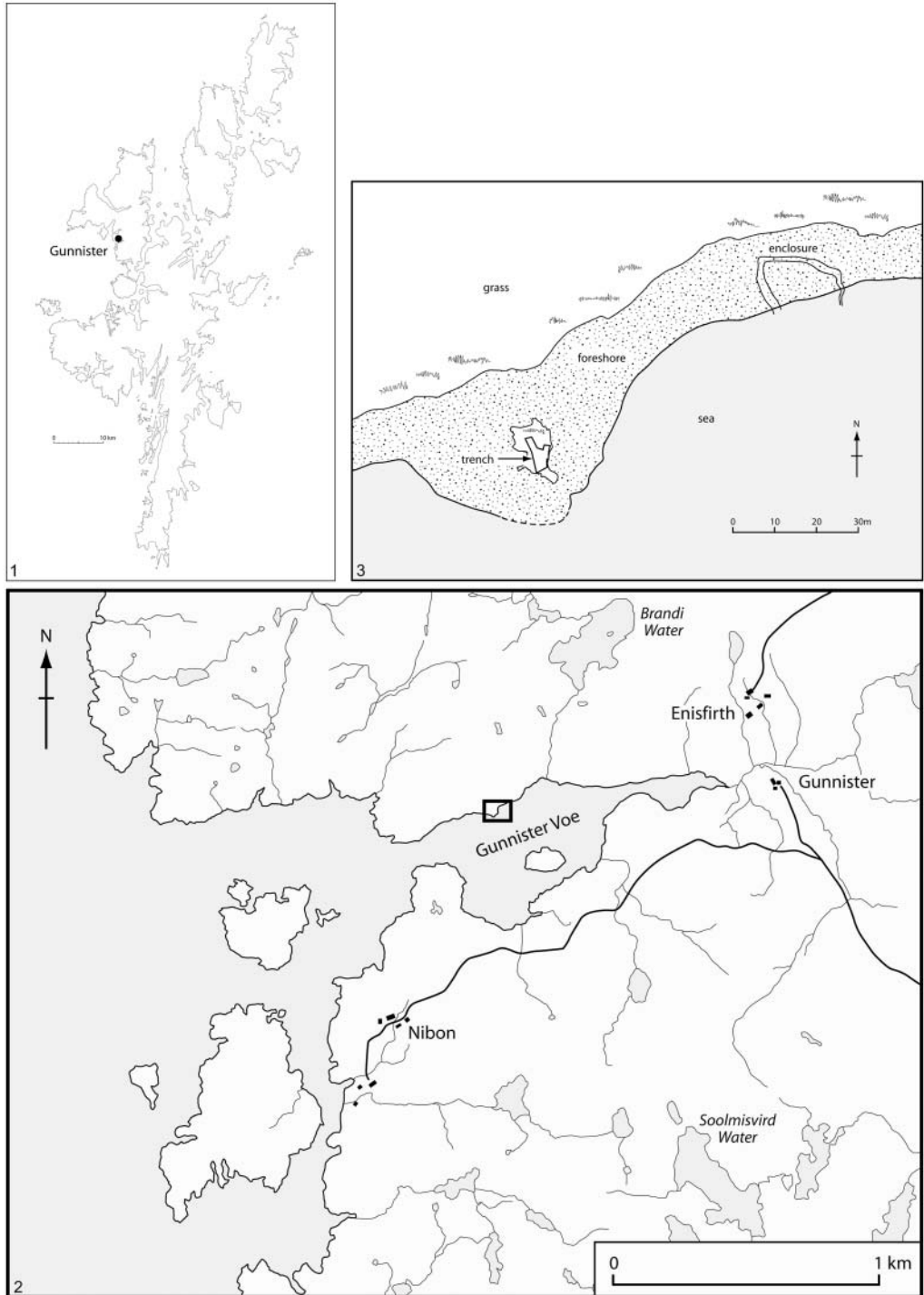


FIG. 4  
Gunnister Voe, Shetland: location of Simon Hagerskale's trading site.



FIG. 5

Gunnister Voe, Shetland: the two surviving walls of the building (photograph, Natascha Mehler).

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FIG. 6

Gunnister Voe, Shetland: excavation area of Hagrie's Böd, showing the effects of erosion (photograph, Mark Gardiner).

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## Mount Foundry, Tavistock: an early 19th-century iron and brass foundry in West Devon

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Between 2004 and 2007, Wessex Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological investigations at the site of the former Mount Foundry Iron Works (later the Tavistock Iron Works), Tavistock, Devon (NGR 074700 248620), prior to redevelopment (Fig. 7).

In July 2006, the older parts of the town were designated by UNESCO as part of the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site (Area 10 — Tamar Valley and Tavistock). Tavistock is a medieval stannary town, remodelled during the 19th century using the profits of copper mining, notably from Devon Great Consols and

Wheal Friendship mines. Four foundries, all established in the 19th century, lay within the town: the Higher or Upper Foundry, later also known as the Mount Foundry or Tavistock Iron Works (the site described here); the Lower Foundry; the Bedford Iron Works; and the Tavy Iron Works. In the context of the World Heritage Site, these foundries were not as significant as their larger competitors in Cornwall (e.g. Hayle Foundries, Perran Foundry), although they were important for serving the West Devon mining district and the local domestic market.

The main phase of excavation at the former Mount Foundry, in 2007, produced evidence for