

20th Anniversary Edition of the PAO Review!



Colony of Avalon Mansion House, Ferryland
400th Anniversary of the
Colony of Avalon



Found at Cupids
Half Groat coin
Reverse (top) and
Obverse (bottom)
See Gilbert this volume

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Archaeology at Ferryland 2021

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Figure 1: 2021 excavations in Area D along the eastern side of the 6.4m by 6.4m building (ca. 1620s).

After a one season hiatus from fieldwork in 2020 (due to Covid-19 restrictions), the archaeology at Ferryland began anew in 2021. Although fieldwork in 2020 was not possible, research, conservation and collection's management continued apace; therefore, 2021 represents Memorial University's 30th consecutive year of archaeological research at Ferryland. This year also marks the 400th anniversary of the founding of the 1621 English colony of Avalon established at Ferryland by Sir George Calvert, the first Lord Baltimore.

Our archaeological investigations in 2021 focused on two areas of the site: the first is the easternmost extent of the 17th-century settlement where, in previous years, staff has been uncovering the remains of a stone structure dating to the 1620s (Area D); the second area is a small parcel of land directly adjacent to the old Colony Café where we have been sifting

soils and piling back dirt from previous excavations (Area G). The following report represents the efforts of a small field and lab crew of eight from Memorial University and the Colony of Avalon Foundation. Much of our continued success is due to the dedication and professionalism of our staff, in particular Neil Jordan, Mercedes Johnson, Debbie Barnable and Donna Teasdale.

Recent archaeology at Ferryland has demonstrated that at least one special-purpose structure was built outside Calvert's fortified 4-acre settlement in the 1620s. The exact purpose(s) of this structure has yet to be determined; however, archaeology has shown it to be a clay-bonded masonry building measuring 6.4m (21ft) on a side with three interior features along its western wall including a central fireplace, an oval furnace and an alcove (Gaulton and Bethune 2020). The location of this structure 30 metres east of

the ditch and rampart fortification that enclosed the settlement and protected inhabitants also suggests that it was not a domestic dwelling. Preliminary interpretations point to one or more activities such as alchemy, assaying, attempted glass production or other related tasks that required constant high heat, the use of refractory ceramics and specialized glass containers. Suggestions by colleagues that this sequestered structure could have served as a hospital have not been discounted, but runs contrary to George Calvert's 1629 statement that "my house hath been an hospital all this winter" (Calvert 1629).

With these considerations in mind, the goal of the 2021 fieldwork was to fully expose and map the

by-product created from the prolonged exposure of clay, sand or other geologic material to high heat. Additional pieces of stoneware crucible were likewise among the finds in 2021; however, the fragments (Figure 2) were from much larger containers compared to what had previously been found at Ferryland. The discovery of both small and large refractory stoneware vessels from this building lends further support to theories associated with industrial activities. The clay tobacco pipe bowls and makers' marks found in 2021 continue to demonstrate that this structure was built in the early 1620s but fell into disuse in the 1630s. As such, the pipes represent a tightly datable assemblage produced in London and Barnstable

and will be of interest to archaeologists in both North America and Northwest Europe.

Targeted excavation of the ca. 1620s builder's trench consisted of a 1x4 metre unit alongside the southeastern exterior of the structure. This operation produced, as expected, a plethora of discarded roof slate fragments along with other masonry debris associated with the activities of the slators and masons who erected the structure during the formative years of the Ferryland colony. As a discrete and closely dated deposit associated with a small, and poorly understood, segment of the



Figure 2: Fragment of a large stoneware crucible from the 1620s-1630s midden deposit.

eastern wall of the 6.4m by 6.4m structure (Figure 1), continue excavation of the associated midden deposit to the northeast and further test portions of a builder's trench, previously identified by Alexa Spiwak, outside the south wall of the building (Spiwak 2019). The task of mapping the remaining structural elements of the building was quite uneventful, yet excavation of the adjacent midden deposit continued to inform our understanding of the activities once conducted within as well as the duration of occupation. As in previous seasons (2018-2019), we continued to find many pieces of melted, glassy residue or

1620s population, the goal was to retrieve more information on the daily lives of Ferryland's former craftsmen. The fragments of earthenware cups, pans and storage vessels, along with some preserved faunal material and scattered clay tobacco pipes found in the builder's trench, represent the remains of the meals and leisure time taken by these individuals during the course of their duties. It is anticipated that this small but important collection will be the focus of a future BA Honours research project.

What we didn't expect to find during our excavation outside the southeast end of the building



Figure 3: Late 17th-century destruction deposit southeast of the 1620s building.

was a more recent, late 17th-century destruction deposit associated with the French attack on Ferryland in 1696 (Figure 3). Well above the level of the builder's trench was a thin lens of charcoal containing late 17th-century objects that had been subjected to an intense fire. Among the finds were burnt earthenware and several partially melted/deformed glass wine bottles (Figure 4, top), one of which had the initials of its former owner (II or likely JJ) scratched onto its surface. The most interesting and fragile of the artifacts was the carbonized remains of a reed/rush basket or mat. Although only a small portion of this object was preserved due to depositional and post-depositional processes, the weave of the basket/mat is clearly visible as are small segments of rope (Figure 4, bottom). The excavation, block lift, cleaning and conservation of this rare organic find was, and still is, challenging. It's therefore important to recognize the exceptional work of the excavator (Julianne George) and our archaeological conservator (Donna Teasdale) who spent many hours carefully exposing, removing and now conserving this 17th-century object.

Exploratory excavations on the parcel of land immediately east of the former Colony Café were prompted by the 2019 fieldwork some 10 metres away. In 2019, we excavated additional sections of the 17th-century cobblestone street as part of Leena Bethune's MA research. As seen in Figure 5, the southern edge of the cobblestone street is approximately 1.21m (4 feet) below the current surface of the Pool road and directly above the cobblestones is an artifact-rich domestic midden dating to the second half of the 17th century. Jordan Hollahan, one of the 2019 field crew, inquired about the area across the Pool road where we sifted our soils and whether we had conducted previous excavations there. Since we hadn't explored this area archaeologically, and since Jordan was returning as part of the field crew in 2021, this was a good opportunity to test that area of the site. Excavation began with a 1x2m trench but soon expanded into a 2x2m unit as the crew proceeded downward through mixed deposits of compacted beach sand containing everything from modern plastic to German stoneware to Chinese export porcelain,



Figure 4: (top) In-situ melted wine bottle fragments; (bottom) carbonized reed basket/mat following excavation in lab.



Figure 5: Southern edge of 1620s cobblestone street and overlying midden excavated in 2019 (foreground); unexcavated land across the Pool road adjacent to Colony Café (background).

Figure 6: (left) Selection of decorative ceramics and clay tobacco pipes from mid-to-late 17th-century midden in Area G; (right) faceted glass jewel from same deposit.





Figure 7: 17th-century cobblestone pavement continuing to the north, east and west of excavation unit.

interspersed with masses of cod bone and wood from former stages that dotted Ferryland's inner harbor for centuries. The uppermost of these deposits represent the dredging of material along the edges of Ferryland's inner harbor (or Pool) back in the 1970s and its re-deposition across lands immediately south.

At 1m below surface, we encountered a domestic midden dating to the second half of the 17th century, very similar in elevation and types/variety of artifacts to that found on the opposite side of the Pool road in 2019. In the midden were North Italian sgraffito and marbled slipwares, decorated tin-glazed earthenware, clay pipe stems stamped with fleur-de-lis decorations and a tiny faceted glass jewel possibly from a button or earring (Figure 6). Directly under the midden, at exactly 1.21m below surface was the south edge of a 17th-century cobblestone pavement continuing to the north, east and west of our excavation unit (Figure 7). Unfortunately, given the fact that the 2x2m test excavation was close to the Pool road and the Colony Café building, we had no choice but to backfill the unit after recording was completed. As

is often the case in archaeology, this pavement and domestic midden brings more questions than answers. What is the extent and purpose of the 17th-century pavement? Is it associated with other structural features? What is the relationship between the pavement and the overlying midden? The answers to these questions must await further investigation.

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