

2010 Interim Report – Sunnyside 1 (CIAI-05)

Barry Gaulton and Stephen Mills

The following report is a brief overview of the preliminary excavation and interpretation of a seventeenth-century European occupation at Sunnyside 1 (CIAI-05) in Trinity Bay, Newfoundland. In May 2010, the authors and four graduate students from Memorial University conducted a five-day excavation at the site, first identified in 2009 (Mills and Gaulton 2010). The goals of this year's investigation were to better define the date of occupation, the physical parameters of the site and some of the activities which took place here during the seventeenth century. The result was an overwhelming success; however, as is often the case in archaeology, many questions remain unanswered. Based on available archaeological and historical evidence, the site appears to have been a winter habitation but it cannot be stated with certainty whether it was occupied by English or French settlers. In either case, it represents an important yet poorly understood part of early European occupation in what is today Canada.

As described in several articles by Philip Smith (1987a-b; 1995), many English and French settlers in Newfoundland initiated a pattern of seasonal movement or transhumance beginning in the latter half of the seventeenth century. After the fishing season ended, some European residents would leave their summer fishing stations and move inland to seek shelter and to hunt, trap and procure timber resources during the winter months. Despite the fact that these transhumant Europeans spent approximately half the year away from their 'primary' summer residences, we have very little information on the exact locations of these winter house sites; nor do we know much about the living conditions at these remote locations until the early part of the nineteenth century (see Wix 1836; Storer 1848/9).

The site of Sunnyside 1 (Figure 1a-b) is located deep in Trinity Bay at the western extent of Bull Arm and far from any known seventeenth-century European fishing stations or permanent settlements. Likewise, its location protects the site from the worst of winter's weather and places it near the natural resources of both Trinity and Placentia Bays – a point not lost of the various Aboriginal peoples occupying this same area for thousands of years (Evans 1980-81; Penney 1978). Historical references to the Sunnyside area are very brief and there is no mention of European settlement (either seasonal or permanent) until the early nineteenth century. In 1612, John Guy, governor of the first English settlement in Canada, at Cupids, visited the area to initiate trade with the Beothuk and began construction of a small house, but was never completed (Howley 1915: 17-18). Over the winter of 1697, Pierre le Moyne D'Iberville spent several months in the Sunnyside area along with French soldiers, Aboriginal and Irish allies and numerous English captives (Williams 1987:81-85). The reason for this occupation was to transport the English prisoners overland into Placentia Bay and from there to the French stronghold at *Plaisance*. In the 1760s, English sources refer to the Sunnyside area as a suitable place to cut lumber and trap furs (Handcock 1989: 124, 225) and in 1835 Reverend Edward Wix recorded the presence of four English families wintering in the area (Wix 1836:43).



Figure 1a-b: Satellite images showing the exact location of Sunnyside 1 (images from Google Earth).

The 2010 excavations at Sunnyside 1 began by clearing much of the overgrowth from the site, establishing datum points and a grid and exposing portions of a fireplace/oven collapse (Feature 1) identified the previous year (Figure 2). The focus then shifted to the south and southeast of this feature in an effort to expose evidence for a living surface and the extent of outlying midden deposits, respectively. A one by four metre trench south of Feature 1 revealed a thin layer of charcoal containing clay pipe fragments, iron nails and a few pieces of coarse earthenware. A second one by four metre area was opened up to the southeast, in a location identified in 2009 as containing substantial refuse deposits. Significant numbers of pipe and flint fragments were recovered along with large numbers of nails and scattered pieces of ceramic, glass and lead. This second test trench also showed the midden deposits to be thickest at the western end but thinning out to the east, in the direction of the nearby shoreline. In both excavation areas, mixed among the European artifacts, were a few large flakes of local (patinated) chert, at least one of which shows signs of further modification. A large (Dorset) biface of the same material was likewise recorded in the midden area. Unfortunately, the later European presence appears to have resulted in significant mixing of earlier Aboriginal occupation(s), at least in the areas tested.

With the exception of the disturbed prehistoric component(s), the remaining site stratigraphy was intact and fairly straightforward. The primary layers consist of the uppermost forest littermat (Event 1) of fir needles, leaves and other vegetation in various stages of decomposition. This layer is soft, moist and reddish black (Munsell color 2.5YR



Figure 2: Partially exposed fireplace/oven collapse – Feature 1.

2.5/1) and typically between 8-10cm thick. Below this is the seventeenth-century occupation (Event 2) mixed with occasional artifacts previously deposited by Aboriginal peoples. Event 2 is black (GLEYY1 2.5N), sandy and organic, ranging in depth from 1-10cm.

In addition to the eight excavation units opened up in 2010, we test pitted in several areas to the south and east of Features 1 and 2 (a 4.6m x 5.5m sod-walled structure, also identified in 2009). The presence of European artifacts in many of these test pits clearly demonstrates that the site spans an area of at least 200 square metres, not including the above mentioned structural remains. The sketch map in Figure 3 shows the major structural features and location of many of the test pits (noted as T.P.)

Of the over 1300 artifacts recovered during the 2009-2010 excavations, European flint (n = 690) was the most common and included everything from large cores to tiny retouch flakes. The presence of several fire strikers/tinder flints and crude gunspalls in the assemblage show the end result of these flint working activities (Figure 4a-b). The relatively high percentage of flint at the site can be explained, in part, by its necessity for making fire and discharging firearms; however it is the relative scarcity of other European manufactured objects (especially glass and ceramic) which makes the quantity of flint tools and debitage stand out.

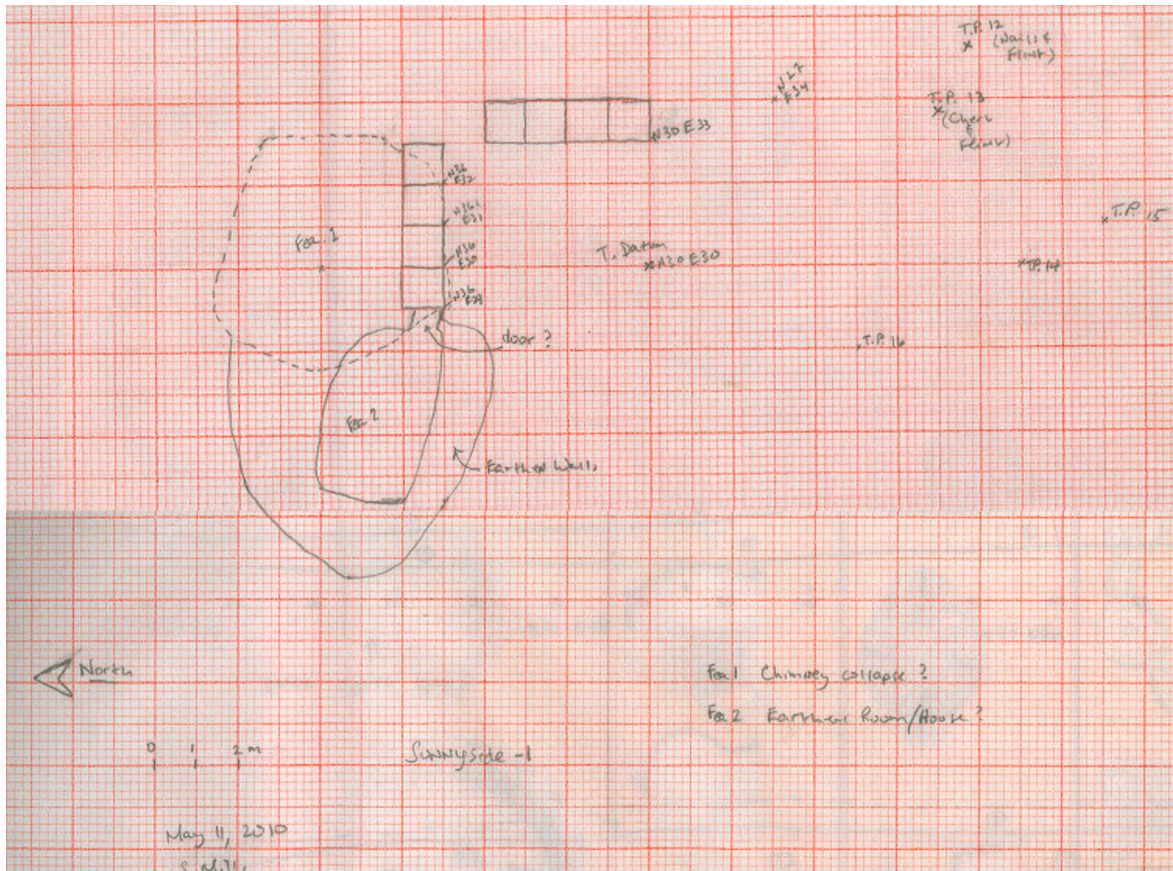


Figure 3: Sketch map showing features, excavation units and test pits at Sunnyside 1.

Iron was another common find, the vast majority of which consisted of nails ($n=200$) of various sizes from 7 inch spikes to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch tacks, likely indicating the presence of a timber-framed structure. At present we cannot say for certain where this structure is but based on the lay of the land, the density of the midden deposits to the east and the presence of a thin band of charcoal south of the possible chimney/oven collapse, it is likely just to the south of Feature 1. In turn, the sod-walled structure (Feature 2) to the west may have been an outbuilding, possibly for storage.

Beside nails, other iron artifacts included a door hinge fragment, two knives, one of which still has the remnants of a bone handle, and what looks to be a pit saw blade fragment (Figure 5). The pit saw blade, in particular, would fit very well with a winter occupation because cutting wood and sawing boards was considered, at least by the 1660s, as an important part of winter activities (Yonge 1663, in Poynter 1963:60). Notably absent from the collection were fish hooks, prongs and other ferrous and non-ferrous metal objects (line and net weights) associated with the cod fishery.

The ceramic and glass artifacts (Figure 6a-c) from the site, although few and scattered, make sense in light of the circumstances. It would not be feasible for Newfoundland residents to pack up and transport all of their possessions from their summer homes to their winter abodes each and every year. The material goods brought to winter houses



Figure 4a-b: Two tinder flints and four crude gunspalls.



Figure 5: Iron hinge fragment (left); pit saw blade (top right) and knife with bone handle (bottom right).

must therefore have been chosen based on people's basic needs. Large quantities of salted provisions and cured meats would not have been among these needs. Unlike summer habitations, where settlers focused on the fishery and relied on these foodstuffs, winter activities involved hunting, trapping and foraging. In this context, it is not surprising to find only the occasional ceramic and glass vessel for the storage of provisions and alcohol, examples of small tin-glazed bowls for personal food consumption and even small a pharmaceutical bottle which contained medicine in the event of illness.

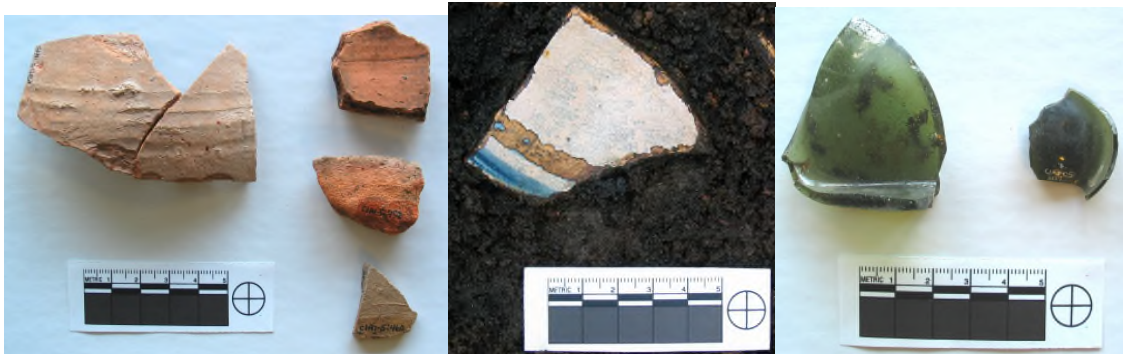


Figure 6a-c: Coarse earthenware fragments, tin-glazed bowl fragment in situ and a glass case bottle and pharmaceutical bottle base.

One commodity clearly perceived as necessary was tobacco and the means to smoke it. Three hundred and fifty two clay pipe fragments were recovered, representing a minimum of 23 pipes. The bowl forms date from around 1660-1680 (Figure 7) and based on their shape, appear to be of English manufacture or fashioned after typical English forms. A couple of these pipes were also broken but later modified to extend their use life, demonstrating a limited number of pipes at the site relative to the amount of tobacco. Beside clay pipes, simple pleasures and leisure activity is also represented by a small (2 cm diameter) circular piece of tin-glazed earthenware grinded/filed down on all sides to make what looks to be a gaming piece (Figure 8). Fragments of what look to be the same vessel were also found on the site, but only this piece shows any sign of further cultural modification, again demonstrating the reuse of broken objects but in this case, for a totally different purpose unrelated to its original function.



Figure 7: Pipe bowls dating from ca. 1660-1680.

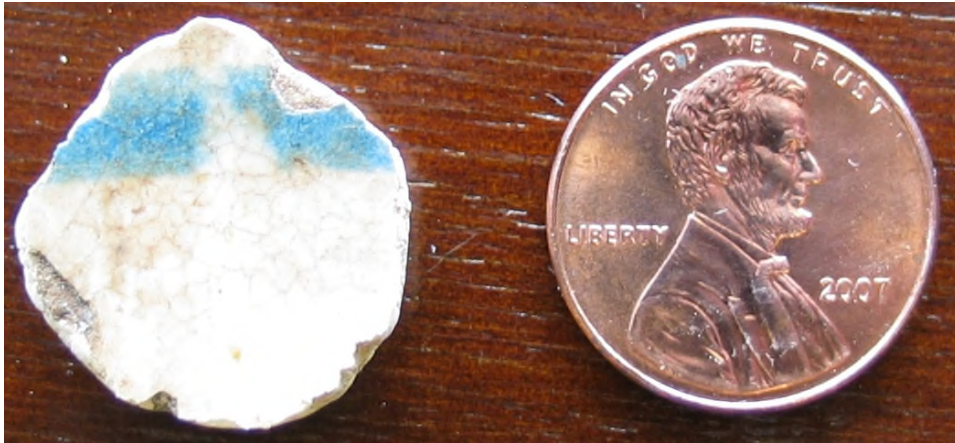


Figure 8: Circular tin-glazed gaming piece.

As would be expected based on gunflint production, a variety of lead shot were found. They were however mostly small ‘bird shot’ as opposed to larger caliber musket balls for hunting large game. Several pieces of lead waste from the shot manufacturing process were also recovered as well as a large chunk of lead which could provide raw material. Unfortunately, the half dozen tiny, calcined bone fragments from CIAI-05 do not shed any light on the local species its occupants were hunting or trapping.

The ethnic affiliation (French or English) of these winter residents must remain unanswered for now. Excavations are still in the preliminary stages, so we are not yet at a point to state with certainty that the material or architectural expressions at CIAI-05 are suggestive of a particular cultural group. Both the English and French were familiar with the Sunnyside area in the seventeenth century. Although Edward Wix first reports the presence of English families wintering here in the early nineteenth century, it is worth noting that his accounts also record the remnants of wooden “ways” or cross beams across the isthmus from Trinity to Placentia Bay which he attributes to the French who “were in the habit of drawing their boats from one bay to the other” (1836: 43-44). Some interesting questions lie ahead, the answers to which will hopefully be revealed through further excavation, analysis and interpretation.

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