

Sarah Newstead – PhD Research Student, University of Leicester

PhD Project Title:

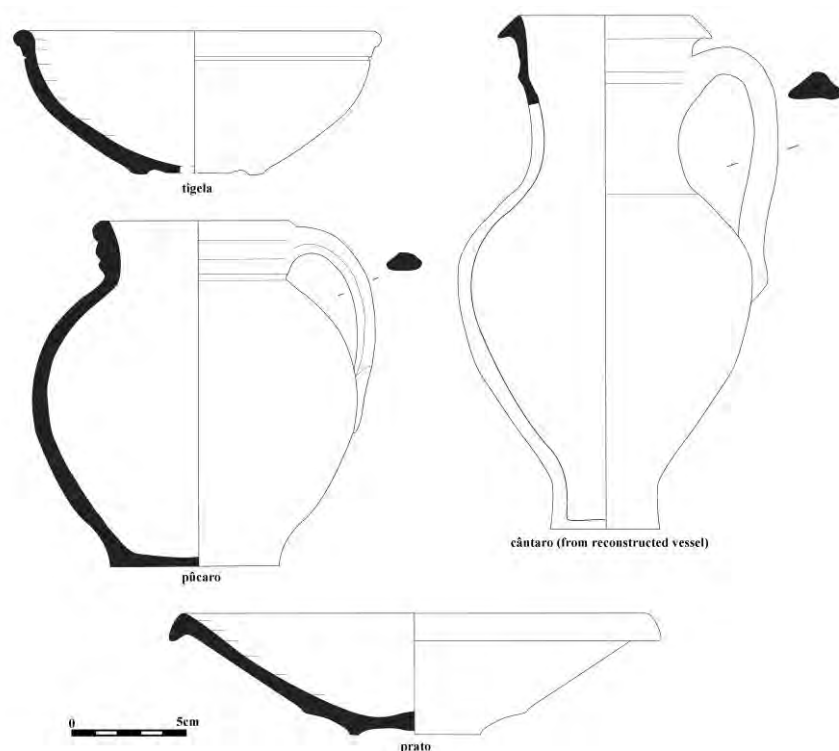
Bacalhau from Newfoundland: Connecting English and Portuguese Participation in an Early Modern Fishery

Supervisor: Dr. Sarah Tarlow

My Project:

My PhD project studies the effects of the burgeoning 17th-century Newfoundland cod trade on long-standing dynamics between English and Portuguese merchants, consumers and producers. My research has involved combining information gained from both archival and archaeological sources in Newfoundland, England and Portugal.

By the close of the 16th century, Portugal had become reliant on other nations to fulfill its demand for cod, an essential part of the traditional Portuguese diet (Grafe 2004). With its increasing fishery in Newfoundland, England became a major supplier of salted cod to Portuguese markets (Pope 2004). Portuguese goods, such as wine and olive oil, were highly saleable in England. Newfoundland cod was often brought directly to Iberian markets to trade, with English merchants bringing the Portuguese goods they acquired through these trades to sell in English markets for profit (Pope 2004). The exchange of Newfoundland cod fits within a long history of trade between England and Portugal. It is an important example of 17th-century Anglo-Portuguese interaction that was concentrated in the North Atlantic and provides a contrast to the well-studied South Atlantic trades (Boxer 1969).



A selection of Portuguese coarseware forms. Drawing by author.

The commodities traded between Newfoundland, Portugal and England in the early modern period were sometimes recorded in port and customs records and these are the records that historians have traditionally relied upon in order to quantify the trade (Fisher 1971). Some of the Portuguese goods, however, also left archaeological traces, particularly in the form of coarse earthenwares. Portuguese wine, oil and salt (amongst other products) were sometimes shipped in earthenware containers (Gutiérrez 2007). Along with the shipping containers, we also find various serving, storage and multi-use wares, such as jugs, bowls and pans on archaeological sites in England and Newfoundland which had associations with the trade to Portugal in the 16th and 17th centuries.



Rouletted design on a Portuguese coarseware vessel. From the Collection of the Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery, photo by author.

Although the total amount of Portuguese ceramics on English and Newfoundland sites during the early modern period is quite low compared to, for example, Devon-produced ceramics, they still provide important physical evidence for trade activity that has been notoriously difficult to trace through documentation alone. North Atlantic trade during the early modern period was rife with piracy, contraband and other illicit activity which allowed commodities to be moved about, but not officially recorded. Official trade between England and Portugal was disrupted by several periods of war during the 16th and 17th centuries, yet goods were still being moved, through activities like contraband trading and privateering. By linking the physical evidence left behind by these complex interactions to the documentary evidence available, my research will be introducing a fresh perspective and a new methodological approach to the history of Anglo-Portuguese trade (Shillington and Chapman 1907).

My research will also improve on the general worldwide knowledge of early modern Portuguese coarse ceramics, which, when found in contexts outside of Portugal, suffer from a paucity of research, yet comprise a significant component of archaeological collections associated with early modern Atlantic trade (Gutiérrez 2000; Newstead 2008). Finally, my project will facilitate international cooperation and collaboration in research, which is essential to further our understanding of the early modern Atlantic world; a world where relationships often blurred the lines of nationality.

My Background:

I am Canadian and undertook my BA studies at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia and my MA studies at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland. I accepted a position at the University of Leicester as a Graduate Teaching Assistant in 2010. I began my archaeological career working on prehistoric sites in the Kingdom of Tonga through a project run by Dr. David Burley at Simon Fraser University. I made the switch to post-medieval archaeology during my time at Memorial University, where I was the Lab and Collections manager for the Petit Nord Project, a major, multi-year exploration of the French seasonal fishery in Northern Newfoundland directed by Dr. Peter Pope. Directly before coming to Leicester, I spent a year working as a commercial archaeologist in Southern Ontario. This position had me handling the post-excavation processes for numerous sites including a great deal of material culture from 19th- and early 20th- century contexts.

My main focus of research over the last few years, however, has been early modern Portuguese coarse earthenwares. My MA thesis was the first serious investigation into Portuguese coarse earthenware found in North America and examined a number of collections from both Newfoundland and Portugal (Newstead 2008). My MA research focused on developing an identification methodology for this ceramic type in North America, but I also established that Portuguese coarse earthenware occurring in archaeological collections outside of Portugal has excellent potential to yield critical information about the continuance and evolution of Anglo-Portuguese trading relationships throughout the 17th century, as well as providing information about the movement and consumption of both luxury and bulk commodities around the North Atlantic world.



A Portuguese coarseware bowl. From the Collection of the Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery, photo by author.

The Importance of Plymouth:

The archaeological collections held at the Plymouth City Museum have played an integral role in my ongoing PhD research. Not only does the city have strong, documented connections to the early modern Newfoundland fishery, the Museum holds one of the best collections of Portuguese coarse earthenware in the UK. My research has been greatly facilitated by the Museum's well ordered post-medieval ceramic collections and its enthusiastic, knowledgeable and helpful curatorial staff. The Portuguese coarse earthenware in the Plymouth City Museum collections comes from a variety of sites around the city, some with well-dated contexts: something particularly useful for research on trade activity. The post-medieval ceramic collections held by the Museum are exceptional in diversity and this is well-demonstrated by the variety of Portuguese coarseware forms present. My current research on the collections at Plymouth should yield information on the types of Portuguese commodities traded to England during the early modern period, and, combined with further archival research, information on how Plymouth's close involvement with the Newfoundland fishery affected the area's long standing trade and social relationships with the Portuguese ports.



A selection of Portuguese coarseware bases. From the Collection of the Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery, photo by author.

If anyone would like further information on my research, I can be contacted at:

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