

Custom-Made Ceramics, Trans-Atlantic Business Partnerships and Entrepreneurial Spirit in Early Modern Newfoundland: An Examination of the SK Vessels from Ferryland

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Abstract Demonstrating ceramic ownership can be a challenging archaeological endeavor, particularly if one seeks to understand the movement and meaning of such vessels over space and time. A small collection of Portuguese faience plates and bowls bearing the initials SK, found during the excavation of a seventeenth-century English settlement at Ferryland, Newfoundland, is an exceptional case in this regard. The SK stands for Lady Sara Kirke, wife of Newfoundland governor Sir David Kirke and matriarch of the Ferryland plantation following her husband's death in 1654. Historical and archaeological records demonstrate Lady Sara's important role in guiding the family's plantation to economic prosperity for close to three decades but her personalized ceramics provide avenues for further exploration. They are indicative of longstanding international trading relationships and associated mechanisms of gift giving, and a window into the use life of personalized ceramics in the context of early modern North America.

Keywords Portuguese faience · Trans-Atlantic trade · Personalized ceramics · International exchange · Heirlooms

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Introduction

The archaeological record rarely allows one to demonstrate ceramic ownership to the level of the individual—a statement holding true for seventeenth-century sites on both sides of the Atlantic. Inadequate documentary evidence, combined with the amorphous nature of early modern ceramic assemblages and imperfect dating techniques often guide us down a path of inquiry regarding the direct connection between excavated ceramics and historic accounts of individuals who are said to have lived nearby. Museum pieces, in the form of curated family heirlooms, are exceptional cases but far removed from the cultural detritus that provide the deeper meanings archaeologists seek. Tin-glazed earthenware vessels from early modern archaeological sites often provide nuanced understandings of the past at the household level through an examination of their role in trade, consumerism, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity (Barker and Majewski 2006, pp. 205, 225). Personalized sets of ceramic vessels associated with known individuals and found in sealed archaeological deposits can provide an additional level of interpretation.

What follows is an examination of Portuguese faience vessels, personalized with the initials SK as their central design element, unearthed during several seasons of excavation at Ferryland, located on the Southern Shore of Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula (Fig. 1). Using a combination of historical and archaeological evidence we are able to trace the trajectory of ceramic acquisition, possession, and reuse. This movement over space and time allows for the identification of several key stages in the use life of these vessels: from commodity, to gift, to object of display and, finally, as a keepsake or family heirloom. Manufactured in Vila Nova, Portugal, these tin-glazed plates and bowls were likely commissioned by an English fish merchant operating out of Porto. All evidence points to Lady Sara Kirke as the intended recipient and initial owner of these decorative pieces. Notably, these vessels were produced sometime after 1650 when Sara Kirke directed much of the family's business interests. An intrasite spatial analysis of the personalized ceramics further suggests that two separate sets of SK vessels were acquired at different times, and the remaining pieces were later inherited by another family member living at Ferryland. The full implications of these findings hinge upon understanding the Kirke family's place in Ferryland society during the seventeenth century.

Historical Context

Ferryland was settled in 1621 under the auspices of Sir George Calvert, later the First Lord Baltimore. Calvert invested huge sums of money in this fisheries-based venture and the ongoing archaeology proves that the colony was carefully planned and well built (Clausnitzer and Gaulton 2012; Gaulton and Tuck 2003; Tuck 2013; Tuck and Gaulton 2013). Having moved himself and many family members to Ferryland in 1628, a series of unfortunate events—including a harsh winter and disputes with fishermen—led Sir George to abandon his residency the following year (Miller et al. 2011). Although still maintained by a Calvert-appointed governor, the nascent English settlement languished over the next decade.

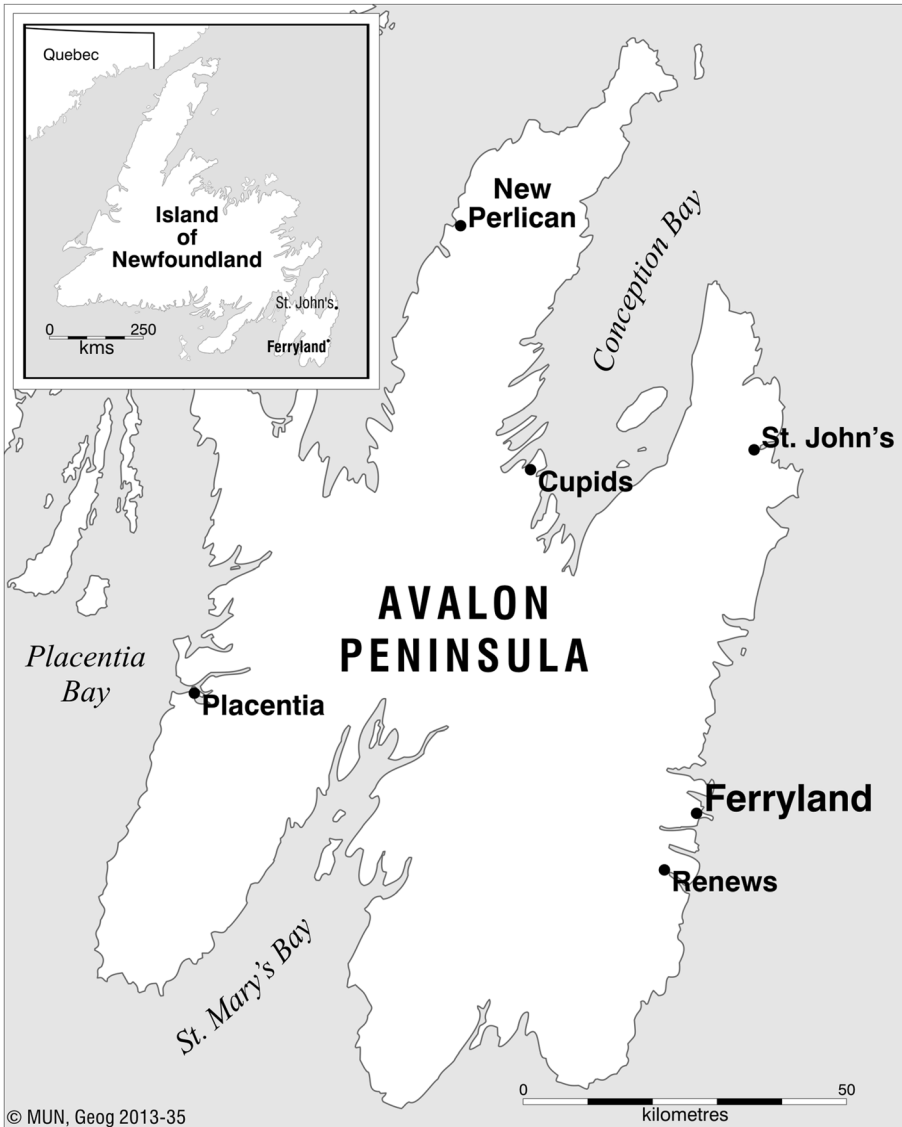


Fig. 1 The Avalon Peninsula with particular reference to Ferryland; the Island of Newfoundland (inset)

The arrival of Sir David and Lady Sara Kirke, and around 100 settlers, in 1638, breathed new life into the social and economic viability of the Ferryland settlement. A royal charter granted Kirke and his business partners a legal right to impose taxes on all foreign ships that plied Newfoundland waters and a virtual monopoly on trade and provisioning for the island (Matthews 1975, pp. 104–111). Further sources of taxable income were collected by Kirke through rents imposed on resident's fishing rooms and licensing fees for those operating a tavern (Pope 2004, pp. 139–40). David Kirke's decision to base his business operations at Ferryland was no coincidence. The presence of a somewhat economically neglected settlement containing substantial waterfront

facilities and other necessary infrastructure was enough justification to displace the Calvert's residing governor and assume possession of the entire village. The extant dwellings, stone quay, waterfront storehouse, and fisheries infrastructure allowed Sir David to implement his plans without having to invest large amounts of money or time (Gaulton 2013). Ferryland in the 1640s thus witnessed a social and economic efflorescence, whereby a combination of taxes, rents and profits from both the fishery and merchandizing saw the Kirke family accrue considerable wealth and influence in the context of seventeenth-century Newfoundland; at the same time, employees and migratory workers acquired good wages and local residents, ship captains, and other visitors could enjoy a plethora of commodities, shipped from various parts of Northwest Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, and the Americas.

Nevertheless, not everyone was happy with the events unfolding at Kirke's "Pool Plantation" at Ferryland. In 1651 Sir David was recalled to London by the Commonwealth to account for his activities in Newfoundland, during which time Cecil Calvert, the Second Lord Baltimore, filed suit against him. Although never formally convicted of wrongdoing, Kirke died in a London prison in 1654. During the 1650s, the Interregnum government appointed commissioners to oversee the daily operations at Ferryland and the Calverts later regained legal claim to the colony. However, the Kirke's hold was not so easily undone.

Lady Sara and her young family stayed on at Ferryland, and in 1660 she petitioned Charles II to extend the charter rights of her deceased husband to their eldest son George, who at the time was no more than 25 years of age (Howard and Chester 1883; Kirke 1660 in Pope 1993, p. 91). These rights were not granted and Lady Sara acquiesced to pay rent to Lord Baltimore, yet she continued to run the family business (Hill 1661 in Pope 1993, pp. 92–93). In these uncertain times Lady Kirke chose not to return to England or to remarry, but to maintain her place and position as matriarch of the plantation. Some 10 years later, an account from the Dutch raid of 1673 notes the key players in the Ferryland fishery including George Kirke, David Kirke (II), Lady Sara Kirke and, importantly, Sara's sister Lady Francis Hopkins (Lovelace 1675 in Pope 1993, pp. 110–111). As demonstrated by a series of records in 1675, 1676, 1677 and 1681, Ladies Kirke and Hopkins were very successful entrepreneurs operating in the context of an exclusively male-dominated fishing industry. In 1675, for example, Lady Kirke employed 25 men and owned 5 boats whereas her sister had 15 and 3, respectively (Berry 1675 in Pope 1993, p. 112). These same records suggest that Lady Sara passed away sometime between 1677–81, for in the lattermost document she is no longer listed as residing at Ferryland. Her personal and chattel property was subsequently distributed among her four surviving sons (Healle 1707 in Pope 1993, p. 188). Local lore has it that Lady Kirke was buried somewhere out on a nearby spit of land known as "the Downs," not far from the family's Pool Plantation (Gaulton and Tuck 2003).

Documents from the 1680s and early 1690s are vague regarding the activities of the remaining members of the Kirke family beyond noting that George Kirke departed Ferryland (to establish himself at nearby Renewes), whereas David Kirke (II) continued to operate out of the Pool Plantation (Buckley 1693 in Pope 1993, pp. 140–144; Story 1681 in Pope 1993, pp. 130–132). Depositions from 1707, taken as part of a legal dispute between David Kirke (II)'s widow and members of the extended Kirke family, further suggest that the surviving sons left the daily operations of the plantation to David II (Healle 1707 in Pope 1993, p. 188; Penprayse et al. 1707 in Pope 1993, p.

191). The youngest Kirke siblings, Phillip and Jarvis, appear to have played lesser roles in the fishing business, although the presence of the former is visible in the archaeological record. The end of the Kirke dynasty at Ferryland came in September 1696 when a French raiding party burnt the village to the ground and ransomed the remaining Kirke boys (George, David II and Phillip) at the French stronghold in Placentia. All three perished by 1697.

The SK Ceramics: Archaeological Context, Analysis, and Distribution

From a modest start in 1984 and 1986, the Ferryland archaeology project developed into a community/university partnership beginning in 1992 (Tuck 1985, 1989, 1993; Tuck et al. 1999). More than 20 years of excavations by Memorial University's Department of Archaeology have revealed one of the most substantial and best-preserved early English settlements in the Americas. We now know that Calvert's colony of "Avalon" was a terraced village enclosed within a ditch and rampart fortification and contained two rows of buildings connected by a cobblestoned street (Miller 2013; Tuck and Gaulton 2013). A brew house and bakery, stable, forge, and large domestic compound (later referred to in documents as the "Mansion House") was located on the south side of the village; whereas the north side contained a massive storehouse, a flushing privy, and stone quay (Carter 1997; Clausnitzer 2011; Gaulton and Tuck 2003; Tuck and Gaulton 2013). Many of these structures were utilized or modified during the Kirke era, while others were dismantled to make way for additional dwellings, a tavern, storehouses, and other outbuildings (Gaulton 2006; Gaulton and Tuck 2007, 2008). Ferryland's seventeenth-century residents endured some hardships but enjoyed many comforts, including tin-glazed ceramics.

Over 40,000 tin-glazed earthenware fragments (43,937 as of 2012) have been recovered from various contexts at Ferryland, of which approximately 200 comprise the SK plates and bowls. Previous studies have revealed that the majority of the tin-glazed earthenware was produced in England—Portuguese faience being the second largest import during the seventeenth century (Stoddard 2000). In addition, Ferryland's inhabitants were also consuming smaller amounts of tin-glazed ceramics produced in the Netherlands, Spain, and Italy.

The SK decorated Portuguese faience vessels have a buff/beige colored fabric covered by a thick, opaque, white lead-tin glaze, decorated with palettes of blue and manganese. Minimum vessel counts reveal that there were at least 7 plates and 5 bowls, the most complete of which measure 22.3 cm in diameter by 3.3 cm high, and 12.3 cm in diameter by 6.2 cm high, respectively (Fig. 2). Both forms share the same primary design element: SK lettering bordered by floral motifs, positioned in the centre of the vessel. They also share two distinct secondary design elements. The first is a continuous lace pattern running on the brim of plates and upper interior side of bowls; the other, an alternating pattern of phytomorphic motifs resembling flower decorations on the brim of plates and the upper-to-mid interior of bowls (Figs. 3 and 4; see Griffiths 1978 for vessel nomenclature).

The lace pattern was one of the most common decorations on Portuguese faience during the second half of the seventeenth century, especially from 1660 to 1700. It was employed in all three of Portugal's faience production centers, namely Lisbon,

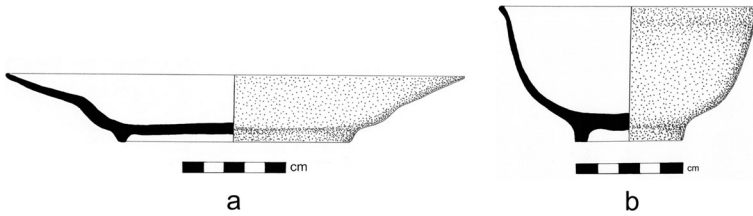


Fig. 2 Illustrations of an SK plate (a) and bowl (b) depicting form and profile

Coimbra, and Vila Nova, just outside Porto (Fig. 5). There is an ongoing discussion regarding the meaning of these patterns and whether they were inspired by the peacock feathers present in Italian majolica since the early sixteenth century or in seventeenth-century Portuguese lace work, very fashionable among high status individuals. Either way, by 1660 it was one of the most recurrent decorations, not only on tin-glazed pottery but also on tiles decorating the walls of palaces and churches. The presence of these same lace patterns on the SK vessels and the use of manganese colorant, not common until after 1650, provide a reliable *terminus post quem* of 1650–60 (Calado 2003, p. 82; Casimiro 2011, p. 149; Santos 1960, p. 110).

Datable contexts from Ferryland provide further refinement. The SK ceramics were clustered in two seventeenth-century domestic deposits. One stratum was located to the

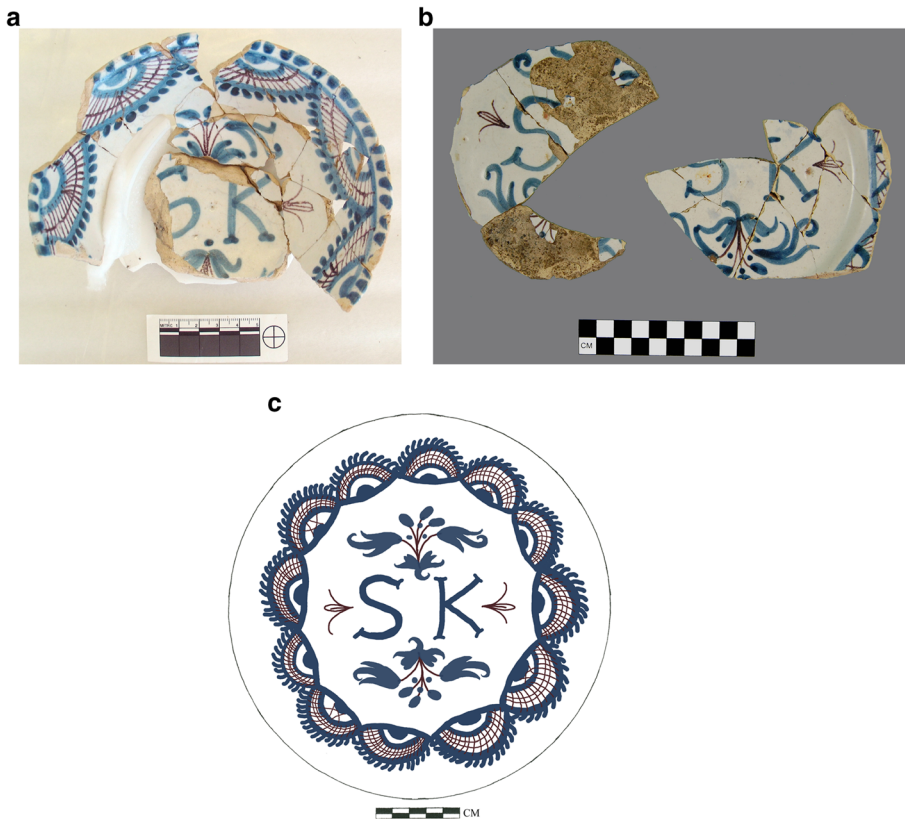


Fig. 3 a Lace-patterned SK bowl; b plates; and c conjectural reconstruction of lace-patterned plate

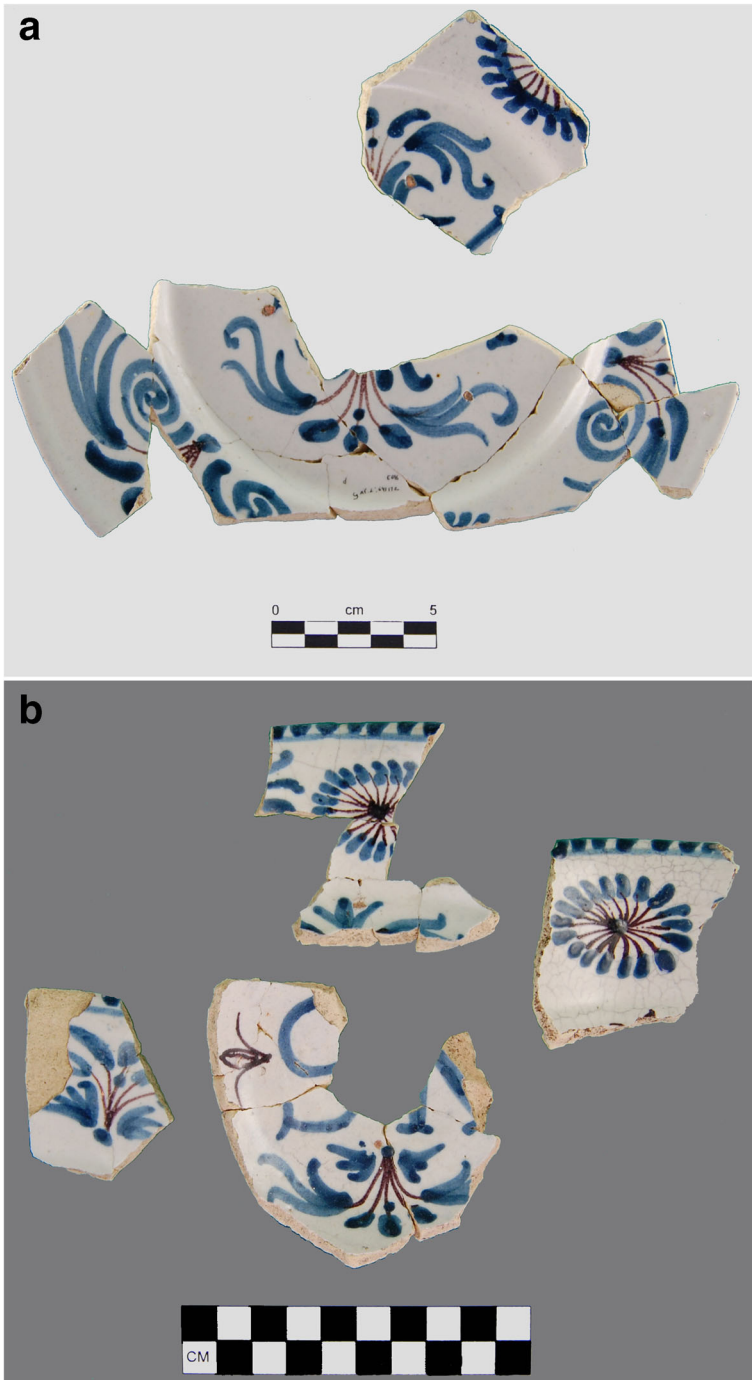


Fig. 4 Phytomorphic pattern on SK (a) plates and (b) bowls

west of the large stone “Mansion House” and enclosed courtyard, built for George Calvert but later occupied by Sir David and Lady Sara Kirke (Tuck and Gaulton 2013).



Fig. 5 Northern Portugal with particular reference to Vila Nova, Portugal (inset)

Its vertical positioning above the remains of an earlier Calvert-era structure dismantled in the 1640s and the typological dating of its clay pipe bowls place this deposit to the period 1650–80. That these SK plates and bowls were found outside the known former residence of Sara Kirke and date to the time when she was managing much of the family's business operations, provide positive proof of ownership. Furthermore, no other individual residing in or associated with the seventeenth-century Ferryland colony share the same SK initials. The second deposit, 30 ft (9 m) to the west, dates roughly to the period 1670–1700 and is believed to originate from a timber-framed house with an H-shaped fireplace. The associated ceramic assemblage discarded by the former residents of this dwelling—including large quantities of

decorative tin-glazed plates and North Italian slipware—is suggestive of their wealth. It seems logical to propose that the occupants of this dwelling were also members of the Kirke family, a connection strengthened by the nearby discovery of two glass bottle seals stamped with the initials PK, likely representing Phillip Kirke, the third son of Sir David and Lady Sara.

Intrasite spatial analysis of the SK plate and bowl fragments indicate that Lady Kirke acquired, consumed, and then discarded *some* of these vessels, while residing in the Mansion House between 1650 and 1680. Forty three percent of all fragments were in the 1650–80 midden, as were 5 of the 12 identifiable plates and bowls (Fig. 6). None shows evidence for use-wear of any kind, suggesting that they were display pieces whose presence in the midden most likely came as a result of accidental breakage. The remainder of the vessels was later transferred, most likely following the death of Sara Kirke around 1680, to the timber-framed house for use by other members of the Kirke family. In a similar manner to those deposited in the Mansion House midden, these pieces show no signs of wear and were intermittently broken and discarded throughout the last quarter of the seventeenth century. A small group of SK fragments was also located to the southeast, on the floor of a late seventeenth-century storehouse. For the purpose of our discussion, these fragments are grouped together with those from the timber-framed house as both structures are believed to be owned by the same family (Gaulton and Tuck 2007). Fifty seven percent of all SK fragments are from this later occupation, represented by 7 plates and bowls.

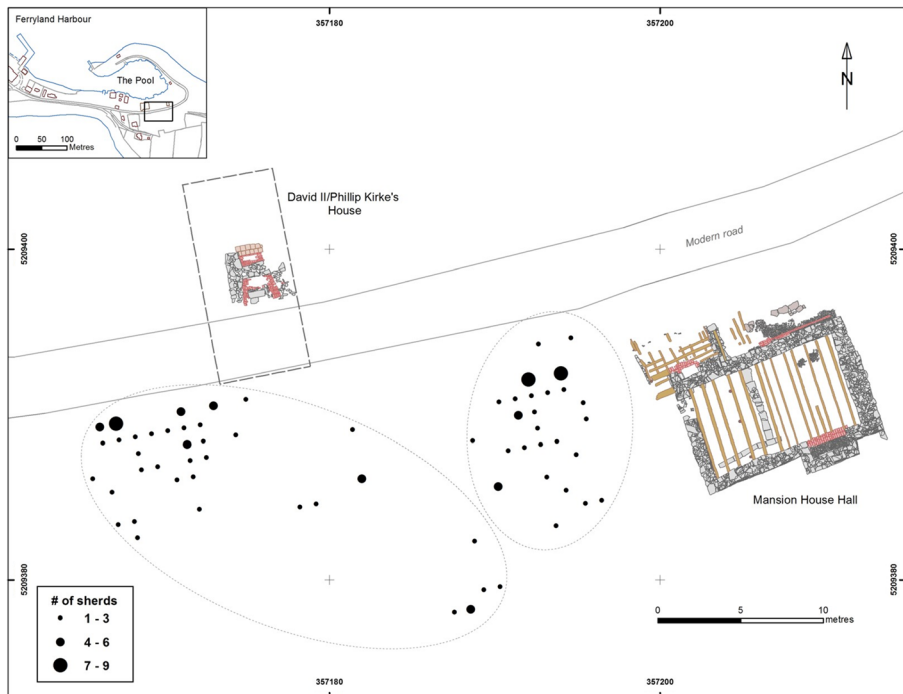


Fig. 6 Distribution of all SK fragments found at Ferryland

The quantification and distribution of the two different decorative patterns reveal other important trends. First, there are more identifiable lace patterned plate and bowl fragments than phytomorphic motif fragments, at 80 and 35 respectively. The same can be said for vessel counts. Of the 12 identifiable vessels, only 8 were complete enough to be attributed to a particular pattern and 6 of these were lace decorated. A second important trend is the uneven distribution of the phytomorphic motif fragments. Whereas the lace patterned bowls and plates are fairly evenly distributed in both contexts—with only slightly larger amounts (54 %) from the earlier Mansion House midden—77 % of the phytomorphic motif fragments are associated with the later 1670–1700 Kirke occupation (Figs. 7 and 8). The vessel counts show an even stronger correlation. All of the identifiable phytomorphic-patterned vessels were associated with the later occupation. An important hypothesis can be gleaned from these results: two different sets of SK plates and bowls, each set with distinct decorative elements, were sent to Ferryland at different times for the exclusive use of Lady Sara Kirke. A set of plates and bowls with lace decoration arrived first, followed sometime later by a second set with a phytomorphic motif pattern but in smaller numbers. How did these personalized, Portuguese-made, tin-glazed vessels come to arrive at Ferryland in the first place?

Portuguese Faience in Early Modern Newfoundland

Strong trading connections between Newfoundland and Portugal during the seventeenth century have long been recognized (Abreu-Ferreira 1995; Casimiro 2013; Cell

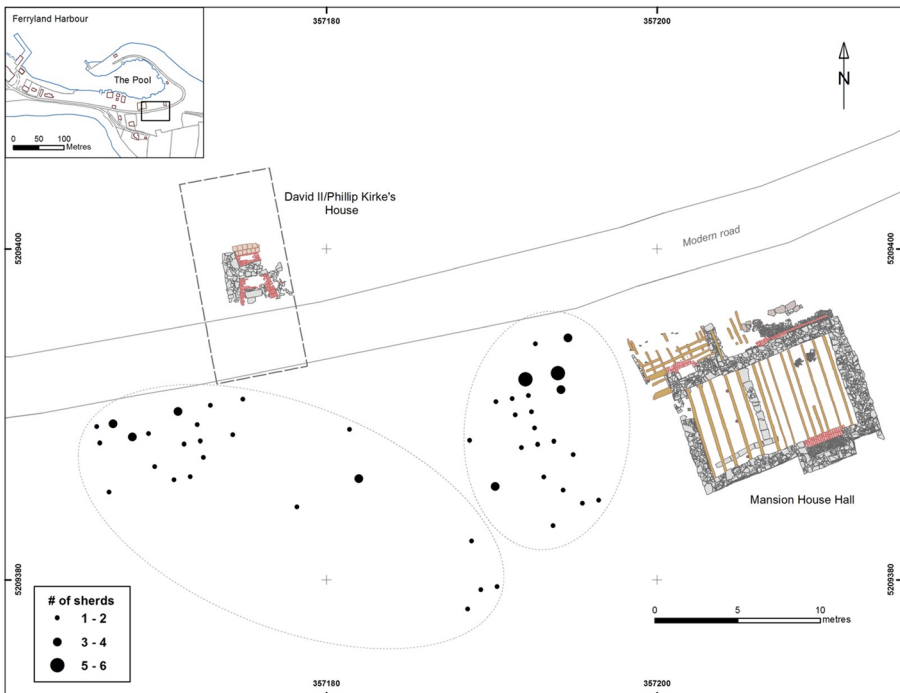


Fig. 7 Distribution of lace-patterned SK plates and bowls

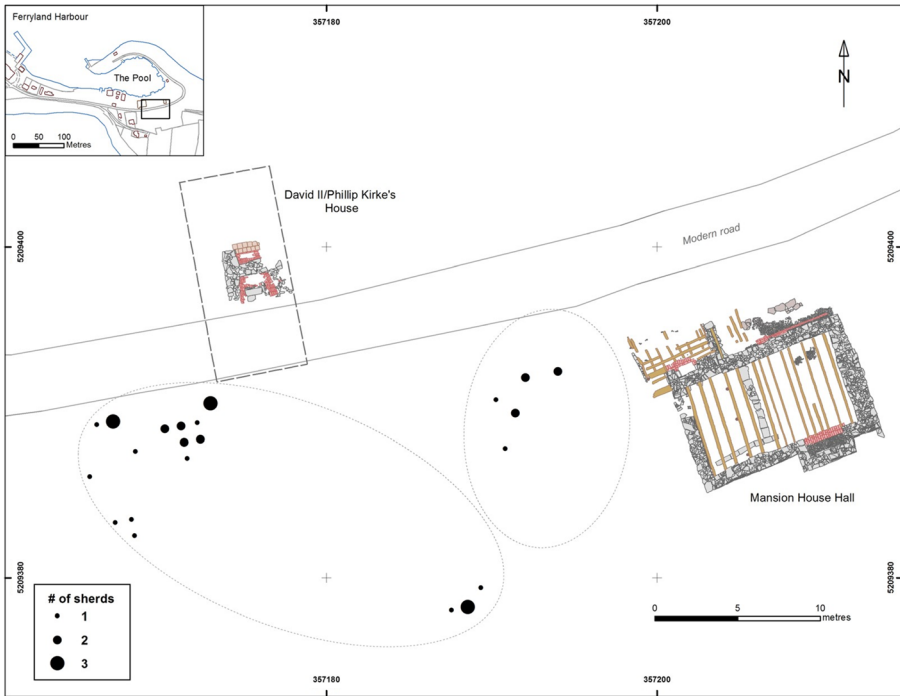


Fig. 8 Distribution of phytomorphic-patterned SK plates and bowls

1969; Morrison 1971; Quinn 1977). Cured and dried codfish from Newfoundland would be transported annually by English ships to various Iberian and Mediterranean ports in exchange for merchantable goods such as salt, oil, fruit, wine, spices, and in some instances, ceramics. Most goods would be unloaded at English ports such as London but some of these commodities made their way back to Newfoundland as part of this cyclical trade. A similar pattern can be seen in the New England fisheries. The physical manifestations of trading partnerships with Portugal, largely in the form of excavated ceramics, have been studied by archaeologists in New England and Newfoundland (Gaulton 2006; Newstead 2008; Pendery 1999; Pope 2012; Stoddard 2000). These works provide information on the variety of ceramic wares, production centers, and port towns frequently associated with this international exchange of “fish into wine” (Pope 2004).

The quantity of Portuguese faience recovered at Ferryland bears witness to the prevalence and persistence of these trans-Atlantic linkages. Approximately 20,000 cataloged fragments include small sherds to almost complete vessels, and based upon stylistic attributes range in date from the 1630s to 1750s. This suggests that the Kirkes (and other families at Ferryland) were already users of Portuguese faience well before the acquisition of the SK plates and bowls. Portuguese wares are also common at other seventeenth-century domestic sites in Newfoundland such as St. John’s, Cupids, New Perlican, and Renewes (Casimiro 2013; Mills 2000; Pope 2012).

Based on the style of lace decoration, glaze quality and red trivet marks, the SK vessels from Ferryland can be traced back to workshops in Vila Nova, south of Porto (Sebastian 2010, p. 467). Comparable wares were recovered during the excavation of a

seventeenth-century workshop in Rua Cândido dos Reis in the center of Vila Nova (Almeida et al. 2001). Outside Portugal, Vila Nova faience was uncovered at sites of former Portuguese colonies and in the port towns of major trading partners. At the Narrow Street site in London, England, for example, several vessels were recovered (Casimiro 2011; Killock and Maddens 2005).

Written sources likewise confirm the presence of these Portuguese wares in Newfoundland. Porto port books record several ships taking commodities to Newfoundland in the second half of the seventeenth century. Tin-glazed earthenware and utilitarian coarseware were included in several of these shipments. Documents reveal that at least 4800 vessels of “Vila Nova” ware were taken to Newfoundland in the last quarter of the seventeenth century. They also reference 12,000 tin-glazed objects without stating the production center, revealing that Portugal was in fact one of the largest suppliers of tableware to the English fisheries on Newfoundland’s Avalon Peninsula (Table 1). Interestingly, the large majority of the ships listed in these accounts are English in origin, as were their Masters (Casimiro 2013, p. 226).

In 1670, the *Agnes* from Topsham took four *cars* (although the unit of measurement for car is not precise, by the late seventeenth century it would typically consist of 50 to 200 objects depending upon their size) of Aveiro’s red coarseware and three hundred dozens of pottery from Vila Nova to Newfoundland, together with some olive oil and linen: “*Despacho do navio per nome Agnes / mestre Roberto Loie vizinho/ de tapasam que vai para a terra nova com a carga seguinte/ Samuel gomes dezoito pipas de azeite e quatro carros de louca de avejro e trezentas dúzias de louça de vila e setecentas varas de pano de linho baixo*” (ADP/CABIDO/Lv.155/1670/ fl.12v.). Ten years later, John Brown from Topsham took into Newfoundland “*cinco moyos/ de sal e cinco pipas de vinho e treze pipas d azeite e trinta duzias de louca e duas caixas de branco*”: salt, wine, olive oil, sugar, and 30 dozens of white ware (ADP/CABIDO/Lv.165/1680/fl.31v.). That same year, Samuel Test from Newfoundland got back with a cargo of salt, olive oil, sugar, and six boxes of white ware and two cars of red coarseware (ADP/CABIDO/ Lv.165/1680/fl. 41). In 1681, the *Fidelity* from Newfoundland took

Table 1 Boats taking pottery into Newfoundland in the late seventeenth century (Casimiro 2013 p. 227)

| Year | Boat | Master | Port of origin | Pottery loaded |
|------|---------------|----------------|----------------|--|
| 1670 | Agnes | Robert Lloyd | Topsham | 4 cars Aveiro’s coarseware 300 dozens of Vila Nova ware |
| 1680 | Ramo Oliveira | John Brown | Topsham | 30 dozens of earthenware |
| 1680 | Delfim | Samuel Test | Newfoundland | 6 boxes of earthenware 2 cars red coarseware |
| 1681 | Raquel | Robert Court | Newfoundland | 2 boxes of earthenware |
| 1681 | Fidelity | George Lord | Newfoundland | 10 cars Aveiro’s coarseware 16 boxes of white ware |
| 1682 | Venture | Robert Clark | England | 16 cars of earthenware |
| 1683 | Centurio | Robert Block | Plymouth | 40 dozens earthenware |
| 1685 | Renovation | William Ray | London | 120 dozens white ware |
| 1691 | Santiago | Nicolas Barden | London | 2 cars ordinary white ware |
| 1695 | Hope | Richard Cork | London | 100 dozens Vila Nova ware |

back salt, olive oil inside olive jars, sugar, berries, 10 cars of Aveiro's red coarseware and 16 boxes of white ware (ADP/CABIDO/Lv.166/1681/fl. 38v). The *Fidelity* is worthy of further note for a vessel of the same name departed Ferryland in the years 1698, 1699, 1700 and 1701 for Iberian ports such as Lisbon, Bilbao, and Cadiz (Fairbourne 1700 in Pope 1993, pp. 174–177; Graydon 1701 in Pope 1993, pp. 178–182; Leake 1699 in Pope 1993, pp. 169–173; Norris 1698 in Pope 1993, pp. 155–168).

A strong English presence in Portugal played a central role in facilitating this commerce, particularly in centers such as Porto where English merchants dominated the cod trade during the second half of the seventeenth century (Abreu-Ferreira 2003, p. 133). By 1654, an English trading factory was established in Porto, the privileges of which were expanded in 1661 following treaties between England and Portugal (Pendery 1999, p. 60). The 1660s was also a period when the market value for salt cod in Portugal was at its highest (Abreu-Ferreira 2003, p. 141). As stated above, most of the cod came directly from Newfoundland, caught by migratory crews from England or by resident planters, who would be at a distinct advantage over migratory fishermen in preparing their product earlier for market. The earlier the fish arrived to market, the better the price. Hence, it was mutually advantageous for prominent Newfoundland merchant-planters and English fish merchants in Portugal to work together.

In 1671, there were nine English merchant houses operating in Porto (Abreu-Ferreira 2003, p. 144). Perhaps one of the affiliated merchants was the source for the SK vessels at Ferryland. However, the important question is not *who* but *what* these international linkages tell us. The SK ceramics inform us about strategic business decisions made across the Atlantic. As discussed by Pope (2012, p. 513), the expensive Portuguese faience found on early modern Newfoundland settlements likely arrived as gifts “sent from commercial partners in Portugal, to strengthen the personal ties, so essential to business in the period.” Although it cannot be stated with certainty whether the SK ceramics were sent as gifts or were specifically requested by Lady Sara, the discovery of two different sets of vessels commissioned at the same Vila Nova workshop but at different times, demonstrates the prolonged nature of these personal dealings. If in fact they were gifts, such objects can be viewed as a pragmatic way for a Portuguese-based English merchant to ensure the continued supply of product to a lucrative market. They also raise the possibility that there were other items/gifts associated with these trans-Atlantic partnerships, flowing in both directions, as a means to secure and maintain longstanding agreements.

Unfortunately, no evidence exists that can help determine the price of Portuguese faience outside the country. Customs books only refer to the fees paid for goods when entering the destination port. Nevertheless, its discovery in contexts related to wealthy merchants in English, Dutch, and other European colonies reveals that its value increased after leaving the country (Baart 1987; Casimiro 2011, p. 173; Martens 2012, p. 61). Undecorated faience was relatively inexpensive in early modern Portugal. In 1700, a convent in Évora bought 15 dozen white faience plates for 2,670 réis, and 2 years later, the price was maintained at 180 réis per dozen (Mangucci 2006, p. 3). During this same period a chicken could be purchased for 180 réis (Faisca 2012). Whether it was decorated or not, Portuguese faience was never so expensive as to be mentioned in wills or probate inventories, in contrast to imported Chinese porcelain or Spanish and Italian ceramics.

Personalized Ceramics in Early Modern England, Portugal, and Newfoundland

Personalized tin-glazed and slip-decorated earthenware became popular in England and Portugal during the seventeenth century. Many of the English slip-decorated wares exhibit the name and/or initials of the potter who produced it and the person(s) for whom it was made (Barker 1993). Initialed tin-glazed pieces, on the other hand, most often represent the owner/recipient and were made to commemorate important life events, such as a birth or marriage (Dawson 2010; Ray 2000, p. 5). Other examples bear a monarch's initials and were created as coronation souvenirs or expressions of loyalty (Grigsby 2000; Ray 2000, p.14). As such, these decorative objects were well suited as gifts.

Portuguese examples from museum collections and archaeological contexts (Baart 1987) show first names such as António, Sebastião or Maria, or family names such as PAS and VIEIRA, but sometimes both: A^{NTO} DA ROCHA (Fig. 9). As expected, the majority of these names are Portuguese; however, there are a few examples of foreign names. A Portuguese faience bottle dated 1628, currently housed at the Hamburg Museum, bears the name of former Hamburg resident Jacob Semmelhacke (Bauche 1994, p. 259). Initials are likewise common on personalized faience and also known outside Portugal, sometimes associated to non-Portuguese coats of arms (Fig. 10). All of these vessels are high quality productions suitable for wealthy families. Unlike some of the English vessels, the owners of most personalized Portuguese faience have not been identified through historic records, neither in Portugal, its colonies nor in the Low Countries, where many personal and family names have been identified in archaeological contexts (Bonke 1988, p.33). Sometimes the name of a monastery, convent, religious order, or hospital can be ascertained: FLAMENGAS, S. JOÃO or S. BR.DO. The SK ceramics from Ferryland thus represent an important find for ceramicists and archaeologists studying early modern Portuguese faience. The same can be said for Newfoundland contexts as this collection is unique among seventeenth-century settlements.



Fig. 9 Portuguese faience with the name ANTO DA ROCHA on the brim, and a lady holding a bird



Fig. 10 Portuguese faience with A.S. initials

The size, positioning and emphasis on the SK lettering help reveal its intended purpose(s). As the central element and focal point of these plates and bowls, Sara Kirke's initials identify her as a key player in a transatlantic business partnership spanning both sides of the Atlantic. These were not just pretty pots. The likelihood that they were commissioned by an English merchant, custom-made at a workshop in Vila Nova and carefully packaged as a gift to be sent 3,000mi (4,828 km) across the ocean, demonstrates the vessels' primary purpose as a recognition or acknowledgement of Lady Sara's pivotal role in this venture. International fish merchants needed large plantation owners like Sara Kirke as much as she needed them. Supportive evidence can be found on initialed museum pieces and archaeological specimens in England and Portugal. Here, initials are most of the time small, even minor elements in relation to the vessel's overall decoration or patterning, the function of which is solely to demonstrate ownership. The prominent SK lettering on the faience from Ferryland is anomalous in this respect.

SK Ceramics in Ferryland Society

These custom-made vessels began their use life as a commodity produced by Vila Nova potters for a Portuguese-based client, and subsequently delivered to Lady Kirke at Ferryland, most likely as a gift. Archaeological evidence reveals that two distinct sets of plates and bowls arrived at different times, and that the remaining pieces in both sets were transferred to another house during the last quarter of the seventeenth century. What function did these vessels serve in the two separate households?

Examination of fragments from both midden deposits failed to reveal any evidence for use-wear in the form of cut marks or scratches on the interior surfaces (see Griffiths

1978, for methodology and categorizations of use-wear). It is logical to suggest, therefore, that these ceramics were not utilized as everyday tablewares. Considering the personal nature and private value placed upon these initialed ceramics, we can assume with some confidence that they were on display. Furthermore, they were likely stored upright on a cupboard or similar piece of furniture so as to emphasize the lettering. Such a placement is common for decorative ceramics with a central design; however, the fragmentary nature of the assemblage prevents us from providing corroborative evidence in the form of abrasion on the rim and footring at opposite ends of the central design when placed in its “upright” position (Griffiths 1978, p.75).

As a set of “personal artifacts,” defined by White and Beaudry (2009, p. 213) as “those used by an individual, belonging to one person and used exclusively by that individual over the course of the artifact’s use life or person’s lifetime,” these vessels may have invoked a variety of emotions for Lady Kirke while conveying a particular set of character traits to others who viewed them. Independence, resilience, and resolve certainly come to mind. The prominent display of these SK ceramics in Lady Kirke’s house (once the former seat of Lord Baltimore) can also be seen as a reflection of the social and economic reality of Ferryland during the 1660s–70s. Despite the fact that the Calverts held legal title to the colony, and Sir David’s first born son George Kirke likely held some measure of authority over some of his father’s former possessions, the history and archaeology both suggest that Lady Sara retained much of the power and influence. A visitor’s account from 1659 is notable in this regard. Upon arriving at the plantation, Reverend Richard Blinman (1659 in Rollmann 1997, pp. 61–62) was welcomed by friends but “also by the Lady Kirke & sundry masters of ships and oth’rs.” There is no mention of George Kirke or the other sons, most of whom by that time had reached adulthood. The Plymouth surgeon James Yonge must have had a similar experience or likeminded notion of leadership at Ferryland for his 1663 sketch (Fig. 11) has ‘Lady Kirke’ written on the lands around the inner harbor (Poynter 1963, p. 81).

When the remainder of the SK plates and bowls were moved from the stone Mansion House to the timber-framed house of another family member, likely around the time of Lady Kirke’s death in the early 1680s, its meaning and purpose was redeployed as well. The identity of those who received, and in turn cared for, these vessels is not integral to this discussion but the historical and archaeological clues suggest that it was David Kirke (II) and/or his brother Phillip. As family heirlooms or keepsakes from a departed parent, these display pieces may have elicited a sense of nostalgia to a time when their mother overcame personal and economic hardships for the sake of her family and the longevity of their plantation at Ferryland. Raised in a society where their parents were at the top rung of the socio-economic ladder, the Kirke siblings likely also recognized the value of these ceramics for their patina and as such they “encoded information about past family members and emphasized family endurance and honor” (Pendery 1999, p. 62).

In the same late seventeenth-century midden we found another tin-glazed bowl fragment bearing the partial initial H as part of its central design, and this find raises further questions and intriguing possibilities (Fig. 12). The vessel shares morphological and stylistic similarities to the SK bowls, but is simple in its decorative elements, although it is also Portuguese in origin and manufactured in Vila Nova. Records from the 1660s to 1690s list no major planters in Ferryland with H as the first letter in his/her given name, but there is one listing for surnames: Hopkins. That is, Lady Francis Hopkins, sister of Lady Sara Kirke and successful Ferryland planter and entrepreneur.

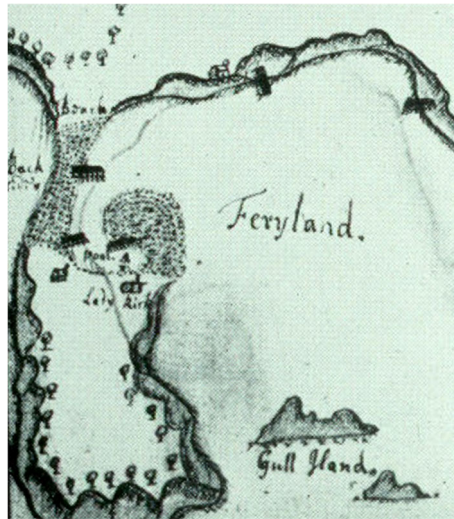


Fig. 11 Jame's Yonge's ca. 1663 map: Part of the coast of Newfoundland, showing Ferryland. Courtesy of the Plymouth Athenaeum, Plymouth, UK

Perhaps the timber-framed house to which the remainder of the SK vessels was transferred is the dwelling of Lady Francis Hopkins. Further excavation may shed light on this possibility. Nevertheless, the discovery of a third example of custom-made, initialed Portuguese faience from Vila Nova suggests that the merchant who partnered with Sara Kirke was also nurturing his professional relationship with her sister—a wise decision considering that both women were prominent planters running large fishing operations in the harbor. Such “gifts” were clearly one of the mechanisms by which early modern merchants could foster and maintain important trade relationships. The SK, and possibly FH, initialed ceramics provide an archaeological signature of this extended family's important role in seventeenth-century Ferryland society, the business



Fig. 12 (F?) H initialed Portuguese faience bowl (*left*) alongside SK bowl (*right*)

acumen of some of its members, and their strong and enduring connections with mercantile interests overseas.

Conclusions

Personalized, made-to-order sets of ceramic vessels are an archaeological anomaly in seventeenth-century North American contexts. Rarer still is our ability to trace these pieces to a particular individual. Lady Sara Kirke was such an individual. Archaeological and historical analysis revealed four stages in the use life of these SK vessels: as a custom order commissioned by a Portuguese-based English merchant, produced by potters in Vila Nova; as a gift to facilitate, strengthen and/or acknowledge business connections across the Atlantic; as display pieces symbolizing the owner's independence, influence and affluence within the socioeconomic context of the Ferryland settlement; finally, as a family heirloom or keepsake reminiscent of the challenges and perseverance associated with life in seventeenth-century Newfoundland.

This research assists in understanding the motivations behind the individuals who acquired, displayed, and reused these objects, and the particular socio-economic circumstances in which they operated. The SK, and conceivably FH, ceramics can be perceived as a tangible manifestation of the close contacts and partnerships fostered during the early modern cod trade from Newfoundland to Portugal; in turn, supporting the contention that Lady Sara Kirke, and other prominent Newfoundland planters, such as Francis Hopkins, maintained long standing business contacts with Portuguese-based English merchants (for a similar perspective on trade between Portugal and New England, see Pendery 1999). To be more specific, these personalized gifts demonstrate a carefully nurtured two-way partnership between specific members of the Kirke family and a merchant or merchants who regularly acquired cargoes of salt fish from Ferryland for trade in Porto. Details gleaned from such an analysis add to the “archaeological biographies” of powerful and independent women such as Ladies Kirke and Hopkins living and working in seventeenth-century British North America (Gilchrist 2000:325).

Previous research on tin-glazed earthenware from Ferryland suggests that, based on vessel provenance, connections between Portugal and the Pool Plantation waned after 1660 (Stoddard 2000). This may hold true as a general statement vis-à-vis the residents of the plantation as a whole; however, the new information obtained from this recent analysis indicates that any losses in quantity were gained in quality, not only for ceramics but personal contacts as well. Decorative, personalized tin-glazed vessels along with examples of other fine Portuguese ceramics are suggestive of Sara Kirke's ability to secure closely-knit trade relationships and diversify her commercial networks as a way to ensure the economic viability of her family's plantation.

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