Early medieval Cornish pottery in Hiberno-Norse Ireland

Summary
The discovery of Cornish pottery in the Hiberno-Norse early eleventh to twelfth century coastal settlements of Waterford and Wexford on the coast of southern Ireland, provide new material culture evidence for contacts between Cornwall and Ireland in the early medieval period. The distribution of Grass-marked wares has until now been thought to be limited to Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, generally dating between the seventh and eleventh centuries AD. However, just as examples of Grass-marked wares begin to decline in frequency in Cornwall they are found in southern Ireland. The main assemblage Cornish pottery found in Waterford is unique to one house and deposited over many phases dated by dendrochronology to between AD 1080 and 1155. The Scandinavian style house had more accommodation available that the houses of bone and metal craftsmen living on the same street, suggesting a non craft-based occupation. The Grass-marked ware was found alongside pottery from Normandy and the Severn estuary area suggesting a cosmopolitan household. The preferential procured Cornish pottery may signify a particular cultural identity synonymous with Cornwall. This evidence does not indicate a general exodus of Cornish peoples on to the shores of southern Ireland, rather it suggests the action of an individual family or merchant living within the broader framework of Hiberno-Norse society. This could represent a new era of Cornish entrepreneurial merchants inspired by the new market towns across the sea and new trade networks.

The evidence of links between Cornwall and its Atlantic neighbours has up to now been based on the mutual consumption of imported Mediterranean pottery and E-ware. The evidence for cultural contact between Cornwall and Ireland in the early medieval period is the Irish names and ogam script on inscribed stones dating from the fifth century onwards (Thomas 1994) and Irish place-name elements (Padel 1985). This can now be demonstrated through the presence of Cornish pottery in southern Ireland. The discovery in 1997 of Cornish Grass-marked pottery in Hiberno-Norse coastal longphorts and trade centres in southern Ireland offers the first material culture evidence of contact 'across the water'. The production of Bar-lug pottery is unique to Cornwall between the seventh to eleventh centuries AD and represents an evolution of native styles whose distribution was until now thought to be limited to the county (Thorpe and Thomas 2007). This distribution can now be extended not only geographically but also in date. The late eleventh century examples of Bar-lug pottery have always been considered to be residual, but this new evidence suggests that Bar-lug pottery was in being *produced* during this period. The presence of this pottery in the tenth to twelfth century contexts in the Hiberno-Norse trade centres of Waterford and Wexford in southern Ireland presents a new understanding of trade and communication networks in action in this period (Fig 1).

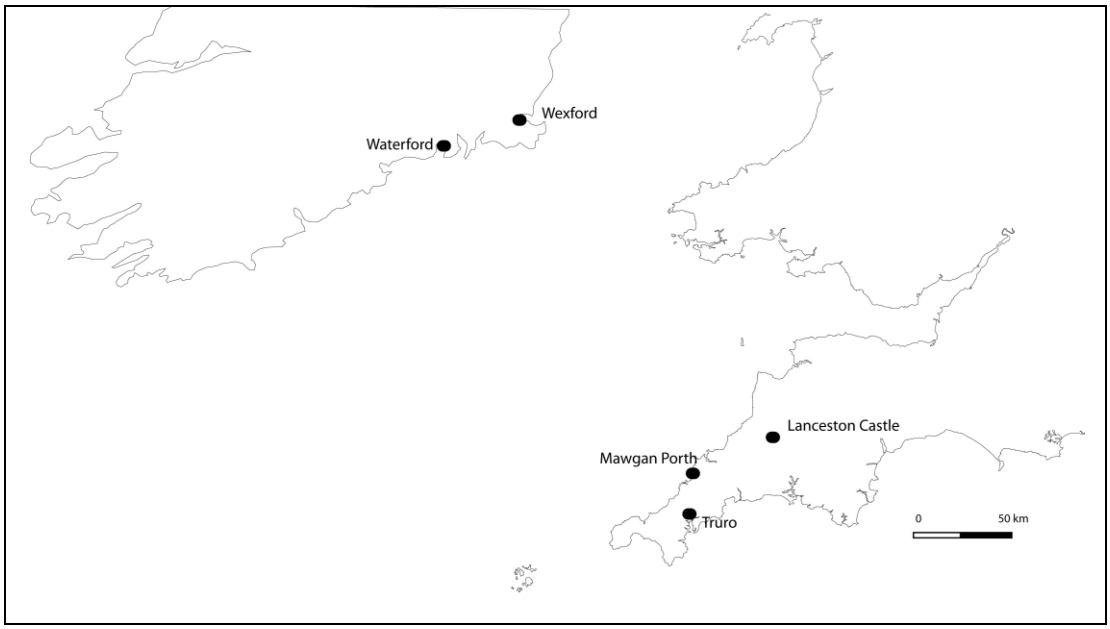

Figure 1. Location map of southern Ireland and Cornwall indicating sites mentioned in text (Drawn Imogen Wood).

The bar-lug vessels are coarsewares with grass-marked flat bases and straight-sided profiles which vary in size and have differing levels of firing from soft to hard (Fig 3). The Grass-marked ware includes platters, cooking pots and bar-lug vessels (Thorpe and Thomas 2007). They are thought to have been used as cauldrons whose lugs prevented the suspension rope from burning (Hutchinson 1979; Thomas 1968; Thorpe and Thomas 2007). The form of Bar-lug pottery does not change from the seventh to eleventh century, and that makes dating problematic. However, current evidence suggests that it stopped being produced in Cornwall by the late eleventh century (Hutchinson 1979), although some Grass-marked platters were found at Old Lanyon dated to the twelfth century (O'Mahoney 1994). Its known distribution within England does not appear to extend further east than the Tamar Estuary (Hutchinson 1979). The only known assemblages outside of Cornwall are to be found in the Isles of Scilly (Hutchinson 1979).

The Grass-marked ware in Cornwall is currently dated from the mid seventh to eleventh centuries AD. The start date for this ware was obtained from a stratigraphically secure context at Gwithian yielding a radiocarbon date of AD cal 650-780 ± 35 SUERC-6160 (Thorpe and Taylor 2009). The closing radiocarbon date for this ware is currently AD cal 856-996 ± 35 GRA-39254 from Gunwalloe in Cury on the Lizard peninsula (Wood 2010). There are other examples from relative dated eleventh century contexts (Allan and Langman 1998-9; Brown *et al.* 2006). The largest relative dated assemblage is from Mawgan-Porth on the north Cornish coast, with a date of AD 910 from a Saxon coin (Fig 1) (Bruce-Mitford 1997). Although only a small number of absolute dates have been obtained, the ware appears to have been in continuous use for around 500 years (Taylor and Thorpe 2008).

This pottery seems to have been the standard household ware into the late tenth and eleventh centuries, as it has been found at Launceston Castle c AD 1068–75 (Brown *et al.* 2006), Southampton Castle (Peacock 1986) and Truro (Allan and Langman 1998-9) (Fig 1). Archaeological evidence suggests that more typically Norman/medieval pottery forms replaced Grass-marked wares after this date (Allan 1984; Todd 1987, 285). The social context surrounding the declining use of Grass-marked wares pottery has never been explained, but it could be of great importance in highlighting the impact the Norman occupation had on the identity of the native population. The tenth and eleventh centuries saw the first market centres in Cornwall at Launceston, Liskeard, Bodmin, St.Germans and Marazion most of which were church-owned markets that in some cases were undermined by the new Norman Lords to secure an income (Preston-Jones and Rose 1986, 164). This suggests that Cornwall's markets had from the beginning been either under ecclesiastical or Norman control.

The Grass-marked wares are generally thought of as a pre-conquest ceramic tradition, with the Norman occupation of Cornwall generally associated with the end of its production (Taylor and Thorpe 2008). However, it would appear that the peoples associated with the founding of Norman settlements utilised Grass-marked ware bar-lug cooking pots to serve everyday needs. This may be the result of incoming peoples buying pottery for convenience, or the native peoples involved in the construction of Norman settlements bringing their own pottery with them. This could certainly be the case for Launceston Castle, in east Cornwall, and Truro, in mid Cornwall. The 195 sherds from Launceston Castle are associated with the construction of the Norman Castle AD 1068 -75, and are found along with Chert-tempered (Uppergreen-sand derived) wares from the Blackdown hills in Somerset (Brown *et al.* 2006, 281). The fabric of those 195 sherds found is divided between gabbroic, local highly micaceous and a mix of the two (Brown *et al.* 2006, 269), suggesting that some west Cornish vessels may have been brought to the castle and subsequently copied.

The almost complete base of a Grass-marked ware vessel, possibly a bar-lug form, was found in Truro offers another occupational context (Allan and Langman 1998-9). The town of Truro was the site of a Norman castle founded around AD 1140 by the Earl Richard de Luci and associated with the earlier estuarine settlement of Newham (Beresford 1968, 413; Shepard 1976). 31 sherds were found in waste deposits stratigraphically below imported twelfth century pottery (Allan and Langman 1998-9), and a few sherds found in a stone culvert nearby (Nowakowski 1998-9), indicate use in a late phase. There is also evidence of Grass-marked ware with bar-lugs at Trelissick only a few miles down the Fal estuary from Truro (Taylor and Thorpe 2008). The bar-lug pottery from Trelissick is the first to be associated with the *tre* place-name element Oliver Padel has suggested represents an early medieval settlement place-name (Padel 1985; Preston-Jones and Rose 2003). In addition, the assemblage includes the only decorated example, with an incised cross on the exterior of the lug (Fig 2).

As stated above, these examples have generally been overlooked and dismissed as being problematic in terms of dating. The eleventh century has always formed the established cut-off date for this ware, but it has never fully been investigated as the limited number of sherds and lack of excavated sites can not support broader conclusions concerning its use in this period.

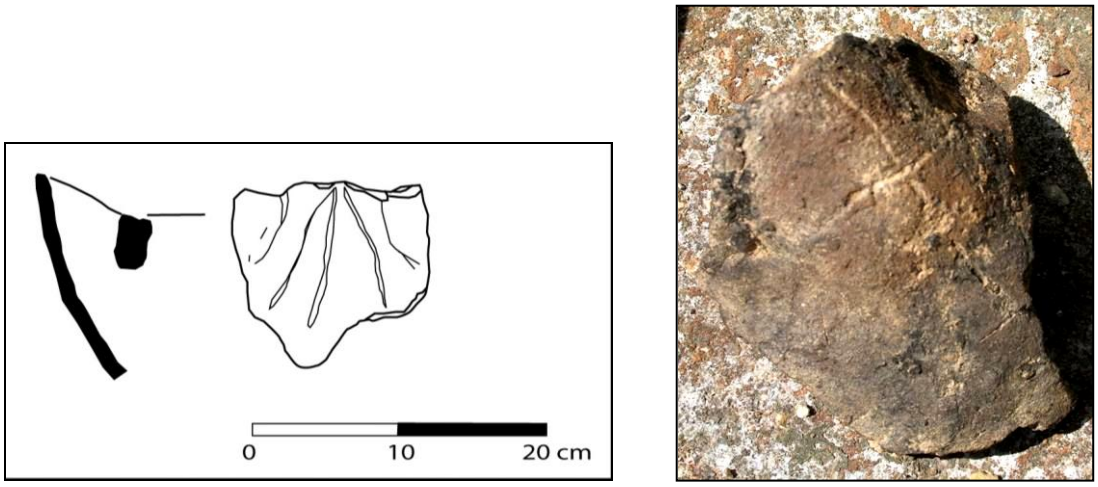

Figure 2. Right decorated lug from Trelissick (Photograph by Imogen Wood), Left is decorated example from Waterford (Redrawn Imogen Wood (*After* Gahan and McCutcheon 1997, Fig 11:1).

Bar-lug in Hiberno-Norse Ireland

However, just at the point Grass-marked ware disappears from Cornish settlements it appears in Ireland. It has been found in quantities on the early eleventh to twelfth century trading ports of Waterford in Munster and Wexford in County Wexford on the southern coast of Ireland (Barton 1988; Hurley and Scully 1997). These longphorts were founded by Vikings and were strategically situated on coastal estuarine peninsulas providing both defence and ideal trading locations (Hurley 2010). In the late tenth century these settlements were taken over by native chieftains resulting in a mixture of Norse and Irish cultural elements (Hurley 1998). These sites subsequently came under Anglo-Norman rule in AD 1170, but this had little effect on the material culture and expression of native identity (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2008).

Waterford is the most extensively excavated Hiberno-Norse settlement in Ireland. Around 30 per cent of the medieval town has been excavated, and this has revealed entire streets complete with houses, backyards and craft areas (Hurley 1997). The waterlogged nature of the deposits has provided an impressive view of all aspects of life, with well preserved wattle houses and organic materials (Hurley 1997). The settlement was laid out on a grid system much like other Scandinavian sites, with narrow strips of land allotted to each house fronting on to paved streets.

The function of Waterford in the early eleventh to twelfth century was not as an emporia or a military outpost, but as a town with a fusion of rural agricultural and seafaring peoples with the common aim of trade (Hurley 1997, 895). In the wider context of Hiberno-Norse Ireland, the Gaelic Chieftains strived to control towns such as Waterford, which had become crucial as focal points for economic and religious affairs with extensive trade networks (Hurley 1997).

The artefactual assemblage at Waterford for the early eleventh and late twelfth century demonstrates that trade links with Cornwall, the Severn Estuary and north-west France were well-established. The excavations have produced a substantial ceramic assemblage, including the largest Grass-marked ware assemblage anywhere for the tenth or eleventh centuries AD with a total of 898 Cornish sherds from the site (Gahan and McCutcheon 1997). The main concentration of the Grass-marked ware assemblage is specific to a single house plot on St.Peters street: Plot 3 (PS3). This produced 226 Cornish Grass-marked ware sherds relating to four phases of occupation (Gahan and McCutcheon 1997; Hurley and Scully 1997, 329). There are examples of grass-marking on bases and lower body sherds along with an example of a decorated lug and some sherds with internal charring (Fig 3). It is estimated that there are a minimum of 12 bar-lug grass-marked vessels and a minimum of 71 cooking pots (Gahan and McCutcheon 1997, 288). Its identification was confirmed by Dr. Alan Vince, after which Prof. Charles Thomas commented on sherds shown to him (Hurley and Scully 1997). Based on this identification of diagnostic vessels the fabric and form helped identify further examples within the assemblage which were all coarseware cooking pots, no Grass-marked platters were present. The decorated lug may provide a parallel for the incised cross on the example from Trelissick perhaps representing a late eleventh to twelfth century trait of Grass-marked ware bar-lug forms.

The fabric of the Cornish pottery from Waterford is described as "very coarse and includes gravel temper" (Gahan and McCutcheon 1997, 289). Petrographic analysis of one sherd by Dr. Alan Vince could not identify it as a Cornish fabric, although no specific fabric source was given. It is not certain if the fabric is gabbroic, but it is not local to Waterford and may represent pottery brought from Cornwall or elsewhere in Ireland (Clare McCutcheon, pers comm). Although, not all Grass-marked ware vessels have a gabbroic fabric, as examples from the Isles of Scilly are granitic. Future collaborative research and petrological analysis is required to address this question.

The pottery from PS3 was found in floor layers, backyard areas, pathways and rubbish pits, suggesting Grass-marked ware was an everyday item utilised like any other vessel (Hurley and Scully 1997). The exceptional preservation of wooden objects has made dating the phases of PS3 that contained Grass-marked wares possible through dendrochronology. This indicates a period of use between AD 1080 and 1155 (Brown 1997, 647). This would make it contemporary with the vessels at Launceston Castle and Truro. Unlike the Cornish sites the PS3 assemblage shows that Grass-marked wares were used alongside vessels from Normandy, Bristol, Bath and South-East Wiltshire (Gahan and McCutcheon 1997, 330).This suggests a far more cosmopolitan context in Waterford than in Cornwall, where there is no evidence these wares were used within the region.

O'Sullivan *et al.* have commented that Ireland prior to AD 800 was involved with a specific trade network that facilitated the transportation of exotic goods through coastal emporia (2008, 270), and this seems to have been the case for Cornwall as well (Thomas 2007). These goods such, as African Red slip wares, Amphorae and later E-ware, were then transported inland to their ultimate location: of high status and ecclesiastical sites (Campbell 2007). However, following the establishment of Hiberno-Norse towns in the early tenth century there was a significant change in the way external trade was managed and pottery distributed (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2008, 270). These towns now functioned as emporia *and* market places, which O'Sullivan *et al.* suggest may explain why so few exotic goods are found on

ecclesiastical or high status sites inland in this period (2008, 271). Similar changes in the mechanism of trade could have occurred in Cornwall, which may have had a similar internal trade network to Ireland.

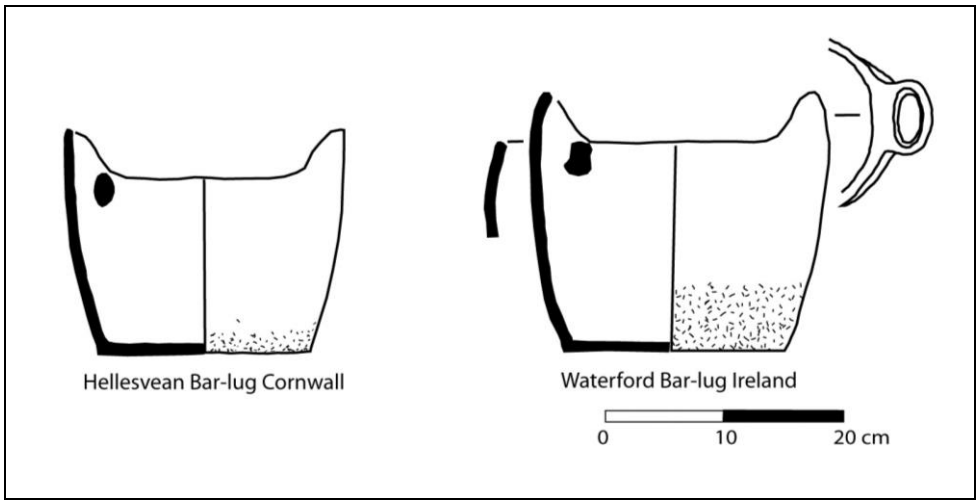

Figure 3. Grass-marked ware bar-lug vessel from Waterford showing form and decoration on lug (Redrawn Imogen Wood source (*After* Gahan and McCutcheon 1997, Fig 11:1).

Who lived as no.3 St.Peters Street?

The clearly-defined house plots at St. Peters Street are thought to be the individual households of merchants, craftsmen and families living in a cosmopolitan trading centre (Hurley 1998, 2010). The house was a typical rectangular wattle structure with rounded corners whose interior was tripartite in plan (Hurley 2010). A path led from the entrance on the street front, through the centre of the house to the backdoor and into the backyard (Scully and McCutcheon 1997, 55). The interior had a clay floor, central stone-lined boxed hearth, aisled bed and benches and paved areas (Scully and McCutcheon 1997, 55).

It is possible that the concentration of Grass-marked wares in house plot PS3 represents a Cornish merchant or family who brought their own pottery or traditional pottery styles with them. The dates for the structural phases suggest the pottery was in use for around 70-80 years, perhaps inferring two generations. The identity of the occupants is therefore, of great interest in understanding how Grass-marked wares came to be there. The house plot PS3 was unique in Waterford as it had both a house fronting the main street and but two comfortable bunk houses either side of the backyard pathway (Scully and McCutcheon 1997, 62). The preservation of wooden planks and wattle walls suggest internal divisions for beds in the bunkhouses (Scully and McCutcheon 1997). The stone-lined hearth box had an unusual flat stone in one corner thought to be a pot-stand, (possibly for a Bar-lug pot?). The Bar-lug pottery went out of use in the late eleventh to early twelfth century with residual sherds turning up in the late twelfth century, although, the house plot continued to be occupied into the early thirteenth century (Scully and McCutcheon 1997).

The other material culture evidence for this street suggests that the occupants of PS3 were sandwiched between bone comb makers and metal workers, but PS3 did not produce

artefacts to suggestive of a particular craft (Hurley 1997, 898). There was a higher proportion of wood chippings in the backyard which could suggest woodworking or perhaps the dumping of chippings for a floor surface (Scully and McCutcheon 1997). The typical range of Waterford household items were found: stick pins, a bone comb, stone weights, querns stones, iron nails, fish hooks, whetstones, a buckle, spindle whorls, leather shoes and wooden domestic items, and do not suggest a high status household (Hurley and Scully 1997). One can only assume that the occupants derived their income from trading or performed another service in the town.

The Cornish pottery connection is not unique to Waterford as Grass-marked ware is also found at Wexford in county Wexford further up the south-east coast (Clare McCutcheon, pers comm.). The port of Wexford has a similar history as Waterford: it was founded as a Viking longphort and represents another important tenth to thirteenth century trading centre (O'Sullivan *et al.* 2008). The possible Grass-marked ware from this town was associated with a small house dated to the pre-twelfth century phase of occupation, however this is a preliminary observation to be discussed in the forthcoming publication (Clare McCutcheon, pers comm.). Further examination of the assemblage is needed, but initial findings suggest a similar context to use to Waterford (Clare McCutcheon, pers comm). This is another example of the trade networks in action and suggests that selective use of Cornish pottery not limited to one location but integrated into Hiberno-Norse society and its communication networks. Clare McCutcheon (pers comm.) has suggested that there may be more Hiberno-Norse assemblages containing Cornish pottery, but its importance in Ireland has not been fully appreciated until now.

More ceramic research and analysis is needed to plot the distribution and extent to which Bar-lug pottery was used in Ireland. There are also some vessels from the Waterford assemblage that are similar in form to Cornish Sandy Lane style 1 cooking pots, which are in the same fabric as the Grass-marked wares. It is hoped that future collaborative work will enable a more detailed overview to be made and answer some of the questions posed by the current evidence.

Discussion

The current evidence presents a very specific context of use for Grass-marked wares in Hiberno-Norse southern Ireland. It is obvious that it was not transported from Cornwall as a commodity as it should have been found in other houses within Waterford. The singular fabric representing around 70-80 years of consumption within the home suggests that that either, the original vessels brought to Ireland were curated, or that they were made near Waterford by someone with a knowledge of Cornish pottery traditions. The use of Bar-lug pottery alongside pottery from Normandy and the Severn estuary suggests that the occupants of PS3 had a choice in what pottery was used in the home and the ability to purchase more if necessary. This leads to the possibility that the pottery was specific to the occupant of the house and perhaps preferentially procured because it signified a particular cultural identity synonymous with Cornwall. There is also the temporal context, which suggests that Cornish pottery was in greater demand in Ireland than Cornwall where the limited 11th century evidence suggests a possible decline in production. The cultural context may infer that the Norman occupation of Cornwall led to people moving out of the region or enabled them to travel along new Anglo-Norman trade networks. There may be a link

between the early twelfth century disappearance of Grass-marked wares in Waterford and the growing Anglo-Norman involvement in the town leading to occupation in AD 1170.

The points above do not indicate a general exodus of Cornish peoples on to the shores of southern Ireland, rather they suggest the action of an individual family living within the broader framework of Hiberno-Norse society. The implications of this discovery present new avenues of enquiry into the impact of the Norman occupation of Cornwall and Ireland and the affect this had on the identity of its people. The presence of Grass-marked wares in Hiberno-Norse trading centres as discussed above offers a tangible link between Cornwall and southern Ireland in the early medieval period. It is clear that individuality and identity are pertinent to an understanding the Waterford Grass-marked wares and that a certain amount of prosperity and freedom was available to express it. The evolution of trade networks suggested by O'Sullivan *et al*, could be of great relevance to understanding Cornwall's relationship with other cultural groups in the early medieval period.

If the motivation and market for trade in the post-Roman Cornwall was aimed at similar pre-ninth century clients, as in Ireland, its suggests that Cornwall may have had a similar social structure. The new early medieval trade networks in action for Hiberno-Norse Ireland, and possibly Cornwall, were obviously motivated by a different client base. This would require a new type of trader concerned with supplying not only the exotic goods but bulk commodities. This could represent a new era of native entrepreneurs inspired by the new market towns across the sea where goods could be both sold and bought, perhaps outside the control of high status patrons. This is a common outcome of the emerging capitalism that shaped early medieval Europe heralding the beginning of trade networks we still employ today.

Conclusion

This paper has outlined the presence and implications of the first material culture evidence for trade and communication between Cornwall and Ireland from the early eleventh to twelfth centuries. More work is required to realise the full potential of this data which will undoubtedly provoke more questions. However, it is clear that there is a relationship between an early Norman social context in which Grass-marked wares are seen to decline and its appearance in a Hiberno-Norse settlement across the water in southern Ireland. These new markets and trade networks may have enabled merchants from Cornwall to settle in southern Ireland due to the open economy of the newly formed market towns such as Waterford. We may then imagine a successful Cornish merchant feeling at home in Hiberno-Norse Ireland as long as there was stew in a bar-lug pot to come home to.

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