



Secretary's Notes

Council met again at the British Museum on 30th September. The meeting was overshadowed by the news of Sarah Jennings sudden death. An tribute to Sarah is included in this newsletter but I did not feel that it could go without mention here, as Sarah was such stalwart supporter of the group and a sponsor of so many projects that members have been involved with.

that Alan had an impact on.

Another long-term supporter of the MPRG, Alan Vince, will be commemorated at a one-day conference on 27th February, *Things Medieval* will reflect the wide range of areas of interest

The group's annual conference for 2010, Dating and Deposits, has been booked and this year will be in Perth, Scotland from the 14th to 16th June. This promises to be a very interesting and important conference. It will focus on the recent development of a new pottery chronology from the long-established London chronology. It will also discuss wider issues of site dating and find deposition. Abstracts for papers are required by the end of February, please see the enclosed information for further details

Volume 31 of *Medieval Ceramics* is proceeding well and will again be ready on time for conference in June. This volume includes a number of papers that were given at the Sienna conference and is fittingly dedicated in the memory of John Hurst. Several occasional papers are also proceeding towards publication for next year.

Work continues on getting the MPRG Online Bibliography back up and running. The site will now be hosted by ADS, it is hoped that much of the backlog will be entered over the Christmas break and that the site will be up and running early in the New Year. Council feel that the bibliography is one of the most important services that the group provides and it is our main priority over the coming months to get the service restored and bring the entries up-to-date.

Andrew Sage Secretary

Sarah Jennings: A Tribute

The sad news of the death of Sarah Jennings came as a shock to all her many friends and colleagues, despite the fact that many of us knew of her persistent health problems. A full obituary will appear in the forthcoming *Medieval Ceramics* but the Newsletter seems an appropriate medium for a less formal tribute.

I first met Sarah in 1983, myself just at the start of my ceramic journey, she already well known as the author of *Eighteen Centuries of Pottery from Norwich*. That publication was regarded then as a model pottery report and it is still widely used and quoted, which lent its author, from my perspective, an air of seniority. As we got to know each other I came to recognise her great knowledge, wide experience and strong sense of right and wrong. Those attributes won the lasting respect and admiration of myself and many other colleagues and fellow archaeologists across Europe. Add to that her unbending determination and you've got a formidable advocate for anything she supported. Fortunately for us, among many other things, medieval pottery was one of her interests and she applied herself unstoppably in promoting and supporting the MPRG. In 1990 that forcefulness came to the fore, as she became Secretary and effectively architect, of a newly constituted group. Her energy and willpower saw us through that difficult period and for that alone she is owed a huge debt of thanks.

Once Sarah joined English Heritage she was able to support the cause of medieval pottery studies further, focussing mainly on seeing through the recommendations made by Maureen Mellor in *Medieval Ceramic Studies in England*. The EH funded training courses, a database of production sites and the *Classification of Medieval Ceramic*

Forms were all achieved thanks to her. Only this year she and I had submitted project designs for the new Research Framework project and for securing the Alan Vince archive. I recall working with Sarah and Lorraine Mephram on the *Classification*, and one memorable aspect of a very pleasurable project was the extensive discussions over a few persistent sticking points. It was always very difficult to argue with Sarah, if not pointless, and we acquiesced to her opinion much more often than she gave in to ours. Her authority and certainty were admirably unassailable. Always approachable, ever generous with her time and knowledge and invariably committed, Sarah will be greatly missed.

Sarah has bequeathed money to the MPRG and the Association for the History of Glass to fund bursary schemes that will foster a new generation of specialists. No details of the sums involved nor any conditions of the bequest have yet been established but the MPRG will be setting up a separate fund for this project. Anyone wishing to make contributions to that fund in memory of Sarah is welcome to do so by sending cheques to our treasurer, clearly indicating the purpose of the donation. We hope to have further details of the bursary scheme for the next newsletter.

Duncan H. Brown President

More late Saxon Stafford-type ware kilns discovered at Stafford

Excavations conducted by Oxford Archaeology at the former Tipping Street car park, in Stafford town centre, between September and November 2009, uncovered the remains of two late Saxon Stafford ware kilns. One kiln comprised two phases, with a second kiln built directly on top of an earlier kiln. In addition to the kilns, waster pits

of pottery and fired clay kiln superstructure were found nearby. These produced at least 2000 sherds of pottery. One particularly large waster pit, mainly full of fired clay, was found in the south-western part of the site, a considerable distance from the two kilns. This may have been associated with a further, as yet undiscovered, kiln.



One of the late Saxon kilns excavated at Stafford.

The ground plan of both survived remarkably clearly, with their dark scorched clay-lined bases contrasting strongly with the much lighter brown exceptionally sandy natural soil. Like the three previous kilns found in Tipping Street in the 1970-80s (see below) the kilns are of Musty's Type 1B, simple updraught kilns with a central pedestal supporting a raised circular oven floor (missing here), probably bridged by clay firebars, and each with a single flue or stoke hole (Musty 1974, 44-45). The circular firing chamber of the kilns was remarkably small - only c. 1.5 m. in diameter. The base or lower floor of each was lined with a thick layer of clay which was clearly and methodically palmed and kneaded into position. The two-phase kiln on the eastern side was the best preserved. The earlier kiln is at least 0.3 m. deep, with a stoke pit to the west. It was filled with fragments of dismantled kiln superstructure which included clay firebars as thick as a human arm. A second phase of kiln was constructed exactly within the footprint of the earlier structure. The central pedestal was circular in plan and composed of sandstone blocks and clay. The surviving entrance to the flue arch or stoke hole was also reinforced with sandstone blocks. The many clay superstructure fragments include firebars formed around a central sticks. Other pieces of superstructure are embedded with pot sherds and some external surfaces show stick-wiping and fingerprints. It is conjectured that the loaded kiln, with its walls of fired clay, would have been covered with a layer of potsherds resting directly on the upturned bases of the stacked pots and then additional clay perhaps added to this to form a temporary dome. Archaeomagnetic dating samples have been taken from the two-phase eastern kiln.

Three previous late Saxon kilns were found in the Tipping Street area in 1977 and 1982 (Ford 1998-99, 11) so it was not entirely unexpected that at least some additional evidence for pottery production would be found on the current excavations, but it was a bonus that two completely new kilns were revealed. Other possible production sites are known from other sites in town. The only pottery produced in these kilns was Stafford-type ware - a competently wheel-thrown industry, advanced for its time, and comparable in quality to the dozen or so other wheel-thrown pottery industries in late Saxon England. Although this assemblage is still being processed (and still coming off site at time of writing), the only vessel forms noted so far are abundant ovoid or globular jars with sagging bases and a variety of plain and thickened everted rims, and a few smallish bowls with steep walls and plain rims. Some of the jars have a lightly

impressed shoulder band of square rouletted decoration and some have sets and pairs of horizontal incised lines. No other forms have been noted. The fabric is very sandy and predominantly oxidised. Stafford-type ware is thought to have been produced between the 9th and the 11th centuries and was traded as far afield as Dublin and North Wales to Hereford (Ford 1998-99).

Other features uncovered by the excavation include a late Saxon wattle-lined pit and an early medieval stone-lined well plus evidence of medieval sand quarrying. In the northern part of the site the remains of the Turk's Head Inn (19 Tipping Street) were uncovered. In a back room of the inn was a floor of post-medieval quarry tiles and beneath this, buried upright in its own little pit, was a complete mid-late 17th-century German Frechen stoneware drinking jug, or Bellarmine, with a grimacing human mask. Although this was found to be empty, and evidence for any original stopper had not survived, the context of its discovery makes it highly likely that this was used as a 'witch bottle', buried for superstitious practices. This was certainly the explanation trumpeted by the local media, and coming just a few weeks before Halloween the 'Stafford witch bottle' achieved a notoriety both in the local, national and even international media, that its original owner could hardly have dreamt of! (just Google and see for yourself). It also made an appearance on websites dealing with the supernatural, and the official witch bottle website. It even got a mention in a respected Pakistani newspaper. Needless to say, very few of these publications mentioned the late Saxon kilns but, no doubt, their day will come.

Bibliography

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Musty, J, 1974 'Medieval pottery kilns' in Evison, V I, Hodges, H, and Hurst, J G, (eds), *Medieval pottery from excavations: studies presented to Gerald Clough Dunning*. London: John Baker. 41-65.

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English Heritage Training Courses

I would like to thank English Heritage and MPRG for the planning and organisation of several training courses. I know from experience of organising conferences that the hard work behind the scenes often goes un-noticed and is usually only commented on when something goes wrong. The fact that everything appeared to go so smoothly is all due to the initial planning and administrative work carried out by Victoria Bryant and the late Sarah Jennings, so a big thanks goes to them for all their hard work!

Fabrics Course

I had attended a "Fabrics" course many moons ago and enjoyed it then. Many of my veteran colleagues, who may also have attended years ago and several of whom were instructed in the arts of fabric analysis by the legendary, late Alan Vince may have thought that they wouldn't learn anything new, yet I think that they would have been pleasantly surprised! Although it was necessary for David Williams to re-iterate the basic rules behind fabric analysis, I found that the combination of new faces, new sherds and a tame potter at hand (Sandy Budden), threw new light on the subject.

Prof. David Peacock's input on the principles behind the identification of inclusions and his insight into the history of petrology in British archaeology were an unexpected

bonus, as was the ensuing discussion. Subjects up for debate included the problems that we have regarding the lack of time and money available for petrology and scientific analytical techniques, as well as the limited available expertise in ICPS and thin section analysis. These issues are exacerbated by the problems associated with grey literature and getting work out into the public domain. The importance of specialists being involved at the earliest possible stage in the project planning process was stressed. Plus ça change!



Participants on the Technology of Pottery Production course on a tour of John Hudson's workshop.

The Technology of pottery production

What a fun way of learning some of the basic methods used in making medieval pottery! John Hudson started the course by giving us a demonstration on a homemade medieval wheel; a cross between the one used by a female potter making Siegburg vessels on a 15th century playing card (see Jenner 1989; Gaimster 1999 Plate 1) and that illustrated in Picolpasso. We sat in the garden under a marquee, watching the ease with which he could knock up medieval vessels, while behind us was a superb display of very convincing replicas. Afterwards we clambered about his garden looking at his potting shed, levigation pits and kiln site with amazement that this talented man had set all this up all on his own completely from scratch.

The visit to the West Yorkshire Archaeological Unit included an opportunity to view some material from a "Stamford ware" kiln in Pontefract (Roberts and Cumberpatch forthcoming). It changed any simplistic notions of provenance that we may have had; similar types of pottery being produced at different sites and geographic locations.

The second day was also very entertaining! John sped us through the making of pinch pots, use of hand building techniques and the wheel. Most of us made a fantasy animal, a slipped mug, a Roman lamp and a Cistercian salt in the shape of a female figure. The latter ranging in character from the frankly grotesque to the actually quite attractive!

Post-medieval pottery

David Barker and Miranda Goodbys' expert lectures and lovely coloured images were accompanied by lots of useful reference sherds. The dreaded cream wares, pearl wares, porcelains and china were all there to hold up to the light, admire and scrutinise (I must say that I have always had some difficulty telling them all apart)! Their guidance on the use of the correct terminology was also invaluable.

There was such a lot of information to impart in a relatively short time, so it was extremely useful to be given very extensive and comprehensive notes on the wide range of post-medieval types and a reading list to ponder at a later date.

In conclusion...

I felt that everyone thoroughly enjoyed these courses as they provided a marvellous opportunity to learn new techniques, meet new colleagues working in similar or related fields and discuss and exchange ideas.

These courses should be for everyone in the profession as I believe that even the "old hacks" would learn something new, or at least share some of their knowledge and ideas with colleagues. Well done everyone and let's hope they continue!

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- Jenner, A. 1985, The potter's wheel - a product of function or tradition', in *London Archaeologist*, **5:5** (Winter) 130-4.
- Picolpasso, C. 1934. *The Three Books of Potter's Art*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum.
- Roberts, I. and Cumberpatch, C. (forthcoming) *A medieval Stamford Ware Pottery Kiln in Pontefract*.

Anne Jenner

New Ceramic Galleries at the V&A, London

This year has seen new galleries relevant to MPRG members, opening at the British Museum, Oxford's Ashmolean and here the V&A London, a triumvirate of display, but is it a ceramics triumph too? The V&A promises artistry from 2,500 BC to the present day out of the 'greatest and most comprehensive collection in the world'.

The new galleries are designed as a fresh experience for a twenty-first century audience and purport to encompass the entire history of ceramic production. Phase 1's six galleries opened in the autumn of 2009, with Phase 2 promised for summer 2010, when every ceramic object in the V&A's ceramic collection is to feature in an on-line catalogue, along with some 27,000 objects on display in open storage.

The visitor on a walk through the top lit galleries is immediately impressed with the amount of natural light. This gallery leads into a ceramic materials and techniques space with special commissions, computer inter-actives and touchy feely experiences. Visitors will be able to make, decorate and fire their own pots with artists-in-residence. For medievalists, this gallery now houses the reconstructed 13th-century tile kiln from Clarendon Palace, Wiltshire. This kiln was previously in the old Medieval Pottery and Tile gallery at the British Museum. Only two medieval vessels, glazed jugs made at Mill Green Essex, were spotted amongst the 3,300 objects in the Phase 1 displays.

A densely packed World history gallery with largely shiny pots, a ship-wreck assemblage and a timeline, hints at cross cultural influences. There is also a gallery devoted to Studio pottery including a mock-up of Dame Lucy Rie's workshop and an architectural gallery with expanses of tilework from Persia and Spain. Finally a gallery on Factory ceramics and a study collection of twentieth century ceramics have some resonance with contemporary life.

Earthenware pottery vessels were sadly lacking from these galleries and so the place of ceramics in the history of medieval everyday life in much of Europe is missing. This trend is evident at the two other museums, which have even more comprehensive collections of medieval pottery re-opened to the public in 2009 after extensive refurbishment. If three museums with national or

aspiring national status cannot do better justice to the fruits of the past thirty years of rescue archaeology in northern Europe, does this leave the field to regional museums?

Once Phase 2 is complete the new ceramic galleries should draw in more scholars, while Phase 1 will inspire potters interested in past practices and visitors with an interest in decorative and applied arts, but medievalists you have been warned!

Maureen Mellor

Shorter Notices

Medieval Pottery Session at the EAA Conference: The Session "Pottery and social dynamics in the Mediterranean and beyond in Medieval and post-Medieval times" was presented at the 15th Annual Meeting of the EAA, in Riva del Garda in September. Speakers included representatives of several countries (Greece, Italy, Romania, Spain, UK) among which were several MPRG members (J. Bintliff, M. Caroscio, G. Haggarty, D. Hall, B. Jervis). The session focussed on the role of pottery in everyday life across Europe during the medieval and post-medieval periods. The session organisers (John Bintliff and Marta Caroscio) are collecting the papers for an edited volume, to be published by B.A.R.

Meetings and Announcements

NORTH WEST REGIONAL GROUP MEETING: Imported pottery in the North West

The North West Region MPRG will be meeting in March or April 2010 in Chester. The theme will be imported pottery in the north west, covering pottery from the Continent and beyond the north-west region. If you like to offer a short presentation and/or further details please contact Julie Edwards (julie.edwards@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk tel:01244 402027)

SOUTHERN REGIONAL GROUP MEETING: Early Medieval pottery in Southern England

The meeting will take place in Winchester on **Saturday 20th March**. Subjects covered will include a kiln excavated at Shaftesbury and pottery from Chichester,

Accessing The Alan Vince Archaeological Consultancy Archive: Work has begun on the Alan Vince archive and the initial phase of work to catalogue and return items to individuals and institutions. If anyone has a query regarding the whereabouts of material which they believe should be returned to them, please contact Jane Young (email: Janeyoung.pottery@googlemail.com tel: 07903335087) or Anne Boyle (email: Anne.Boyle@apsarchaeology.co.uk tel: 07753600271).

Review of Ceramic Reference Collections: Work is being undertaken to update the list of ceramic reference collections listed on the MPRG website. If you have not been contacted and are in possession of a ceramic reference collection, or know of a collection no longer at the address listed, please contact Ben Jervis (bpj106@soton.ac.uk)

Please note that the deadline for pieces for inclusion in the next newsletter will be **Friday 5th February**.

Also, don't forget you can chose to receive the newsletter in electronic, rather than paper format. This reduces the group's costs as well as being beneficial to the environment. If you would like to stop receiving a paper copy, please contact Berni Sudds (bsudds@pre-construct.com)

Michelmersh, Portchester and Winchester. There will be short papers and a pottery viewing. If you are interested in attending, please contact Ben Jervis (bpj106@soton.ac.uk tel:07834 718097).

MPRG ANNUAL CONFERENCE: Dating and Deposits. Please find attached a call for papers for the MPRG annual conference, which will be held in Perth from **14th-16th June 2010**.

THINGS MEDIEVAL: A conference in tribute to Alan Vince.

Please find attached details of the Things Medieval Conference, which has been organised by MPRG and the Society for Medieval Archaeology in memory of Alan Vince. It will take place at the lecture theatre of the Museum of London on **Saturday 27th February 2010**.

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