



Secretary's Notes

It seems almost implausible that, yet again, I am sitting down to write my notes for the Newsletter with the sad and shocking loss of yet another stalwart of the group and yet here I am again rewriting this opening paragraph over and over as I attempt to distil my own feelings, those of the Council more widely and the achievements and contributions of a well-liked colleague in a few short sentences. By now most, if not all, of you will have heard of the sad death of Anna Slowikowski in November. Anna was a serving member of Council and had been the Regional Groups officer for the last few years (having been Assistant Treasurer during a previous stint on Council) as well as playing a very active role in the South East Midlands Pottery Regional Research Group. Anna had been away from council during her illness in 2009 but it had been very good to see her return at the end of last year. It was also especially pleasing to see her Occasional Paper 'Genius in a Cracked Pot' Late Medieval Reduced Ware: A synthesis' published earlier this year. In my own work Anna had always been ready to lend an ear and provide words of encouragement with my own projects and her contribution to the work and discussions of council were invaluable. She will be sorely missed by us all.

Council last met in September when we were able to thank the Editorial Committee for their work to bring both Anna's volume and the Scottish Redwares Occasional paper to fruition and hear that sales are going well. It is anticipated that Medieval Ceramics 32 will be out by the end of the year. We are receiving fewer offers of papers for Medieval Ceramics but over the next few months we will be working hard to ensure that we stay on track with publishing a copy every year. It seems inevitable that during the current cutbacks economic pressures that researchers and specialists are increasingly under pressure to focus paid work and meet increasingly stringent and shorter deadlines. However without the work of the unpaid members of the Council the work of the MPRG would grind to halt. The reason for raising this is that next summer Jenny Vaughan, who has worked very hard over the last 5 years as our Treasurer, will be stepping down and we now looking for someone willing to take on the role. The group's finances have thrived over the last few years, in no small part due to good financial management, and the scope of the difference that can be made by the groups Treasurer should not be underestimated. I would urge anyone who is interested in making an important contribution to the work of the MPRG should contact me or the President. Those who would like to offer help but feel they cannot take on a council position should not feel that there is nothing they can offer; an appeal in the last newsletter for compilers for the online bibliography drew only two respondents! With the bibliography back on line it is urgent we get it up-to-date so that it can provide an important resource ensuring that current researchers working within strict timeframes can have easy access to the most relevant and recent work, if you feel it is important that MPRG continues to provide and build on this resource please contact me to offer your help.

Andrew Sage Secretary

Pottery Production at Exeter Inn, Barnstaple

South West Archaeology, The Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon, and the North Devon Archaeology Society undertook a community excavation at the rear of a former public house in Barnstaple, Devon. The work at The Exeter Inn on Litchdon Street, Barnstaple, was funded by Devon County Council and individual Barnstaple councillors, and was undertaken by volunteers directed by professional archaeologists from South West Archaeology. The volunteers were involved in excavating, processing and washing the artefacts (mainly pottery) recovered. Pupils from Ashleigh Primary School were also able to visit the site and helped wash the pottery. Support was also forthcoming from the site developers, Loosemore G & Son Ltd. The work took place over two weekends, 28th-31st October and 11th-13th November.

Barnstaple, Bideford and Torrington are well known for their 17th and 18th century potteries, widely distributed across the South West, south Wales, southern Ireland and the New World. Barnstaple pottery is also widely distributed across north Devon in the medieval period.

The Exeter Inn lies on Litchdon Street, originally the main route into Barnstaple from the south. It sits between the famous 19th century home of the Brannam Pottery, and

the historic Penrose Almshouse built 1624-7. The Inn itself probably dates to c.1575-1600, albeit heavily modified.

The excavation was undertaken because previous work on the site undertaken by South West Archaeology in 2010 had uncovered large pits containing misfired pottery, ridge tile and kiln furniture, indicating the presence of a pottery kiln on or near the site. There are documentary references to potters in Litchdon Street in the 16th century, but the pottery recovered was dated to c. AD 1500, making it only the second site in Barnstaple to produce kiln waste of this period, and the only one with stratified deposits.

The community excavation was undertaken with three aims in mind:

- To recover a substantial amount of this pottery and kiln waste. This would allow a type-series of this material to be created, and explore the kiln technology used in this period.
- To understand the stratigraphy of the site. The three evaluation trenches excavated in 2010 had uncovered two massive pits, and the excavation was designed to determine if they formed a single enormous clay-extraction pit.
- To generate interest in the archaeology of the town, and create a group of volunteers who could process

the (anticipated) large number of finds and help bring the excavation to publication.

The excavation succeeded in all three respects. A substantial amount of pottery and associated material (at least 1000kg) was recovered, a large proportion of which was washed on site. The excavation uncovered three intercutting pits, all of which contained kiln waste, but demonstrated that the pits in Evaluation Trenches #2 and #3 were not connected. Lastly, a total of 36 volunteers worked on the site over seven days over two weekends in November, who excavated, washed and marked finds. Some of these volunteers are keen to start work on the post-excavation work on the site, and this will be based in the Museum.



A Selection of Pottery from Exeter Inn

An area approximately 5x6m was opened by machine between the two evaluation trenches, in order to allow room for stepping the sides of the trench for safety. This revealed a single 18th or 19th century wall running NW-SE across the trench, cutting through three earlier pits. The first pit was clearly the same as the pit encountered in Evaluation Trench #3, with vertical sides 2+m deep. This pit [421] was at least 5m wide and 7m long, and contained a sequence of sandy-silt loam deposits containing pottery and ridge tile. Only part of this feature was present in the trench. This was cut by pit [426], a feature approximately 3x4m across with vertical sides and flat base, which lay wholly within the excavated area. Both of these pits were then cut by pit [422], which was at least 3m across and extended beyond the edge of excavation to the west. The fills of this pit were dominated by burnt and shattered roof slate (used as kiln furniture) and a huge amount of pottery (at least 450kg).

All of the pottery recovered could be dated to c.1500, but clear differences in the material recovered from each pit are apparent, even at this stage. The material from pit [426] seems to be characterized by ridge tile and 'barley-twist' jug handles, a small number of 'medieval' encaustic floor tiles, and also includes a small amount of animal bone. Pit [422], in contrast, contained a far higher proportion of burnt slate, coarse sagger material and kiln tiles, but lacked the ridge tile and 'barley-twist' handles. In addition, a small number of stamped sherds have also been recovered, and, in general, the assemblage contained several elements (e.g. flat 'strap handles', encaustic tile) more typical of medieval material.

It was originally thought the pits were dug for clay extraction, but the fact that these very large features cut and recut the same deposits – and each other – imply there is more to it than that. It seems plausible they were, in origin, clay pits, and if not for pottery production then perhaps for cob walling. A small amount of domestic debris was recovered from the earlier pits, including a few sherds of imported pottery (plain Delft-type ware, Beauvais sgraffito). This might suggest we are witnessing the shift from production in a primarily domestic sphere to

more industrialized production. This contention is supported by the appearance of masses of roof slate and coarse saggars in the latest pit. It seems highly likely that a kiln or kilns were located in the immediate vicinity, and kiln tiles and fragments of kiln wall were recovered. The small amount of diagnostic charcoal recovered suggests they were using gorse to fire the kiln(s).

The post-excavation process has now begun, with the aim of washing, sorting, processing and cataloguing the large volume of pottery recovered. This will be undertaken with the help and advice of John Allan, David Dawson and David Jemmett, and utilize the help of the many volunteers who worked on the excavation. It is to be hoped the enthusiasm of the many people involved can be maintained, and bring the material to (relatively!) swift publication.

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16th Century Kiln Waste from Rainford

In September this year a small community excavation took place in the village of Rainford, St Helens in Merseyside. Three test pits were dug, one of which contained a stratified and intact waste dump of 16th century pottery from a kiln. The assemblage is impressive: several almost complete drinking vessels were retrieved, the majority of which are in early dark-glazed ware, often known as Cistercian Ware. The fine ware vessels in the assemblage vary considerably in form, reflecting the individuality of rural production techniques in the area (see figure 1). Most vessels show signs of 'imperfections' due to firing irregularities, which inevitably led to these vessels being discarded and dumped at the edge of a former field which now lies within a back garden.



Figure 1: Group of dark-glazed fine ware vessels uncovered from the 16th century dump deposit.

Figure 2 shows one of the vessels found in Rainford which is an imitation of late 16th century stoneware drinking jugs produced in the German Rhineland at Siegburg, indicating that manufacturers in Rainford were copying vessel forms that were being traded from the continent during the late 16th century.

The assemblage also contains a large quantity of kiln furniture including several saggars, which again vary considerably in size and form. It is evident from the assemblage that many coarse ware vessels were being reused in the firing process as saggars to hold and protect the finer vessels in the kiln.



Figure 2: 'Drinking jug' imitating 16th century Siegburg Stoneware.

This is the pilot stage of a proposed community project that hopes to reveal a great deal about the history of the long-lived and important rural pottery industry in Rainford.

Samantha Rowe Archaeology Dept, National Museums Liverpool (sam.rowe@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk)

Sugar Refining Ceramics from Dundee

Recent excavation and monitoring of the construction of a new swimming pool and leisure centre on the South side of the Seagate in Dundee located a small assemblage of pottery which included a group of industrial redwares. Some of these pieces were internally slipped white and sherds from syrup jars and sugar cones were present. Initial research on the assemblage by the author has discovered that there was a sugar house operating nearby from 1770-1826 that was set up originally by a German William Wiedemann who was the grandfather of the English poet Robert Browning. Recommendations have been made for the chemical sourcing of a statistical sample of these redwares to identify their provenance.



A selection of redware bodysherds showing thin internal white slip.

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The Marvels of the World: Lustreware and Luxury Goods in European Exchange Networks, Berlin

Under the aegis of the Carl Justi Society (founded in 1989 to promote the study in Germany of Iberian and Latin-American art history), a four-day conference was held in Berlin on Spanish lustreware found in north and central Europe. Of the 30 papers scheduled, only 22 were delivered, as some speakers were unable to attend. Subjects addressed varied from the Mediterranean origins and development of Spanish lustreware, holdings in major collections of acquired items, to wider – and in some cases poorly founded or scarcely relevant – topics. Papers which would interest members of the MPRG include the masterly overviews of the archaeological material in Britain by Alejandra Gutiérrez and in east Europe (i.e. in the former Soviet Union west of the Urals) by Vladimir Koval, the finely contextualized accounts of particular finds in Middelburg (Belgium) by Wim De Clercq and in Prague (Czech Republic) by Petr Charvat, and the presentation of 14th-century items excavated in Gdansk and nearby Elbing (Poland) by Monika Borowska. Surprisingly, German finds – particularly of the jug from the North Sea, which featured on the cover of the programme and as part of conference logo – were not discussed.

Hugo Blake

MPRG Conference 2012

The next MPRG's 3 day conference will be held on the Isle of Man on the 21st - 23rd June 2012. with an optional extra day or two for site visits etc. It will be held in conjunction with the Centre for Manx Studies and Manx National Heritage. The theme of the conference will focus on 'ceramics on the edge' (i.e. of NW Europe), looking especially at areas outside normal market patterns and political control. If you would like to register interest or put yourself forward as a potential speaker, send a very short abstract to George Haggarty, e-mail: haggartyg@aol.com. A call for papers can be found with the newsletter.

George Haggarty Meetings Secretary

Obituaries

Anna Slowikowski

It was with very great sadness that we learnt of Anna's death on 2nd November. Anna was a long-standing member of MPRG, and served for many years on the Council. During the 1990s she held the post of Assistant Treasurer, while currently she was serving as Regional Groups Officer, as well as being a member of the Editorial Committee. In recent years, Anna was one of the mainstays of the regional SEMPER group, furthering research, and regularly organising meetings, talks and visits to museums and units. She will be sorely missed by her many friends and colleagues.

Anna had been the medieval ceramics specialist at Albion Archaeology in Bedford since the late 1980s. Following her archaeology degree at Sheffield University, she worked with Steve Moorhouse in West Yorkshire on the pottery from the Wrenthorpe kilns. She completed her M.Phil. thesis on the medieval pottery of the Lowlands of West Yorkshire at Leeds University, and for many years worked on the Anglo-Saxon pottery from Wharram Percy.

Her publications included her contributions to the monograph on the Wrenthorpe Potteries (Yorkshire Archaeology 2, 1992). She was one of the authors of the Minimum Standards for the Processing, Recording, Analysis and Publication of Post-Roman Ceramics (MPRG Occasional Paper 2), and contributed articles and book reviews for Medieval Ceramics. Her most recent book, 'Genius in a Cracked Pot': Late Medieval Reduced Ware: a regional synthesis (MPRG Occasional Paper 4), was published shortly before her death.

Anna's untimely death is a great loss to the study of archaeological ceramics. Many of her friends, members of MPRG with long associations and fond memories of Anna, attended her funeral on 18th November in Bedford. Members of Council and her many friends in MPRG send heartfelt condolences to her husband Philip, son Harry, and relatives.

A full obituary will appear in Medieval Ceramics next year.

Beverley Nenck

Christopher Groenfeldt Petersen

Christopher Groenfeldt Petersen died on the 4th of July 2011 as a tragic consequence of a heart failure during a triathlon contest near his home in Aarhus, Denmark. He was only 33 years old. Christopher had been a member of the MPRG since 2008.

Christopher had a vivid interest in archaeology since he participated in a major urban excavation in his home town of Horsens at the age of 14. This inevitable led to the study of medieval archaeology at the University of Aarhus from where he graduated in 2009 on a thesis on the distribution of Iberian pottery in medieval Denmark. This pioneering work was based on a long lasting study visit in Spain followed by several shorter trips. During these visits he acquired a detailed knowledge on Iberian pottery, a good taste for the Spanish cuisine, as well as learning to speak the language fluently and making many friends. In some ways Spain became his second home.

Christopher committed himself to many other things besides archaeology, and he was an active member of the Boy Scout movement, played in a marching band and a brass band. He loved networking and socializing in his own warm and quiet way. He had many friends and had always room for more. This was also the case when he participated in his first MPRG conference in Siena in 2008, and returned to Denmark telling us all in a very catching way of this fantastic and friendly group of pottery enthusiasts!

Christopher was a talented archaeologist with so many things yet to do, a good colleague and a dear and loyal friend, generous in all aspects of life. He will be deeply missed.

Jesper Langkilde

Announcements

WELSH MEDIEVAL POTTERY RESEARCH GROUP

The Welsh Medieval Pottery Research Group will meet in April 2012 in North Wales (Date and venue to be confirmed). Further details will be announced via the MPRG Facebook page soon or contact Alice Forward (ForwardA1@cardiff.ac.uk) or Sian Iles for further details.

Back copies of some Medieval and Later Pottery in Wales volumes are still available. Anyone interested in purchasing these should get in touch with Sian Iles (sian.iles@museumwales.ac.uk).

INTERNATIONAL MEDIEVAL CONGRESS ON MEDIEVAL POTTERY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

This conference will take place in Silves from 22nd-27th October 2012. The call for papers is open from 1st November 2011-30th January 2012.

MEDIEVAL CERAMICS: CALL FOR PAPERS

There is still time to submit a paper to the next edition of Medieval Ceramics. To propose or submit a paper please contact the editors, Derek Hall (derek.hall1@blueyonder.co.uk) and Chris Jarrett (CJarrett@pre-construct.com).

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