Secretary’s Notes

Council met at the British Museum on 11th March 2009. With great sadness, council spoke of the death of Dr Alan Vince, a previous president of the MPRG. Alan’s contribution to pottery studies was immeasurable and the group expresses its sympathy for his family and friends. In order to commemorate his life and achievements, it was agreed a memorial event would be appropriate, possibly held jointly with the Society for Medieval Archaeology in London in the autumn. In addition, the upcoming conference will be dedicated to Alan as will any volume of proceedings arising from it. An obituary for Alan will also appear in the forthcoming issue of Medieval Ceramics.

The programme for the 2009 conference is finalised and thanks go to Chris Jarrett and Duncan Brown for jointly organising it. Details and a booking form for the conference, which will be held at the British Geological Survey in Keyworth, Nottingham on the 6th June, is included in this edition of the newsletter. The AGM will be held during the conference and all the paperwork for this, including nominations to council and an updated version the constitution, will be released in May 2009. It is hoped that volume 30 of Medieval Ceramics will be released at the conference and will contain at least seven papers and five reviews.

This year our President, Duncan Brown, has focused the group on the creation of a research framework, based on an appraisal of the state of pottery studies across England, Scotland and Wales. This would aim to reassess the state of medieval pottery studies in light of the review carried out by Mellor in 1984 ‘Medieval Ceramic Studies in England; A Review for English Heritage’, which was published on behalf of the Medieval Pottery Research Group. Based on questionnaires and group discussions, this was a comprehensive survey of the state of the discipline at that time. It considered the importance of medieval ceramic studies in archaeology as a whole, issues around pottery processing methods, publication, the requirements of the profession and the future. All these areas alone require a fresh examination in the light of subsequent developments within professional archaeology in the UK, most notably the introduction of PPG16 and the emphasis on commercial, competitive practice. It is hoped funding can be secured to take the project forward and that work can commence on the research strategy in 2009.

The next council meeting will be held at the British Museum on 13th May 2009. Any items for inclusion on the agenda should be sent to the Secretary by 11th May 2009.

Anne Boyle Secretary

ALAN GEORGE VINCE
1952 – 2009

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Alan Vince, who fell victim to cancer in February, at the age of 56. Alan will have been known to many of you, either in person or by reputation, and of course he was President of the MPRG between 1996 and 1999. A full obituary will be appearing in Medieval Ceramics, but it is only right to acknowledge here Alan’s contribution to pottery studies. Alan worked on pottery from all over Europe, from Scandinavia to Spain, applying his acute mind to the use of scientific methods as a means of addressing issues of manufacture and distribution. That approach was apparent from the outset, especially in his thesis on the medieval ceramic industries of the Severn Valley, and his expertise developed in London and was refined further in Lincoln, where he finally set up his own consultancy. His office was the first port of call for anyone who wanted one of the best pottery specialists they could find. They would have found someone immediately welcoming and approachable, and ever willing to share his knowledge and information. Alan was good company, and an ubiquitous, cheery presence at all the MPRG conferences I can recall.
and a good many other events besides. We will all have our own memories of Alan, but I for one recall a great friend, who showed loyalty and trust, and whose unquestioning confidence in my abilities gave me the confidence to persist as a pottery specialist myself. A lot of us owe him a great deal. Many friends and colleagues have commented how difficult it will be to replace Alan’s expertise and great fund of knowledge and although that is true, Alan will be much missed for many other reasons too. On behalf of the MPRG I extend our deepest sympathy to his family.

A few people have already suggested ways in which the Group might acknowledge and celebrate Alan’s work and life. We have already dedicated this year’s one-day meeting to his memory, which is doubly fitting considering the theme is ‘Science and Ceramics’. It would be good to see a large turnout. We also hope to organise a more specific memorial event, probably a one-day conference covering various archaeological themes that interested him. Please contact me if you wish to participate or have any suggestions for other ways to commemorate Alan.

Duncan H. Brown

Maiolica Floor Tiles from Edinburgh

Two sherds of maiolica floor tiles were recently discovered in Edinburgh’s Old Town, at a site between the High Street and Jeffrey Street, an area occupied since the medieval period. Both were found in a large post-medieval pit during an excavation undertaken by Headland Archaeology. Dating evidence for their deposition is scant but associated finds suggest sometime around the early 18th century.

The tiles were both of similar thickness and fabric and are assumed to be from the same floor, though cannot as yet be linked to a specific building. The more complete of the two tiles (see Tile 1) is part of an elongated hexagon shape and has an exact match in the famous tile pavement from Herkenrode Abbey, now kept in the Royal Museum of Art and History in Brussels (see Col.Pl.1, Dumortier, in Gaimster 1999 Maiolica in the North). The Herkenrode floor is known by documentary evidence to have been made in 1532/3 in Antwerp. The other, more fragmentary example is part of a square tile, with a blue ground and what appears to be a yellow oval shaped border for a central design.
These tiles bring to five the number of Maiolica tiles found in Scotland. Notably, all five were found at sites in Edinburgh, along the same road, the High Street, or Canongate as it is called at its eastern end. The other three are more poorly preserved and probably all derive from the royal palace of Holyrood, or from the neighbouring abbey. Two were found immediately outside the palace walls (unpublished excavation by Kirkdale Archaeology), and one was from the Scottish Parliament site, a stone’s throw from the palace (see Scotland’s Parliament Site and the Canongate, Soc Antiq Scot mongr 2008, fig.3.27b).

The Jeffrey Street maiolica tiles are to be analysed as part of a small programme of ICP-MS sampling on tin-glazed and redware ceramics from the site by Nick Walsh of Royal Holloway University and Mike Hughes of the University of East London. It is hoped this will establish if they were indeed made in Antwerp and add some useful information to the existing corpus of data.

Julie Franklin, Headland Archaeology
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Early Medieval ceramics from the hillfort at Crickley Hill, Gloucestershire

Analysis of the ceramics from the Early Medieval phase of reoccupation at Crickley Hill Iron Age hillfort have so far answered a number of questions regarding post-Roman developments in ceramic production within Gloucestershire and beyond during this period. As at other reoccupied hillforts within the southwest, there is evidence for the production of hand-made wares at domestic level, in locally available clays. The use of organic temper within secondary-phase ceramics at Crickley may also be of significance, considering the role of this ware in dating sites within the region, due to an absence of Mediterranean imports in the later 5th to early 6th centuries. It has also been argued that Grass-tempered wares may be indicative of cultural exchange between indigenous and immigrant communities. Furthermore, preliminary investigations indicate the selective use of particular clays by specific social groups at Crickley.

However, comprehensive quantification of the Early Medieval ceramics from the site (of which there are many thousand sherds) is required, before more confident conclusions regarding ceramic manufacture, exchange, and use, might be drawn. Volunteer assistance in this task would be most welcome.

It is the intention to publish the results of these enquiries within one of a series of site reports, although a webpage has been established to facilitate contact with the researcher undertaking this project in the interim:

http://romanandearlymedievalcrickleyhill.blogspot.com/

This webpage also enables the display of interesting finds from the Early Medieval Crickley archive: should those with greater experience in late- or post-Roman local ceramics be able to comment upon any of the more puzzling examples, this too would be most welcome! It should also be noted that the compilation of a photographic record of diagnostic finds is well underway: if anyone wishes to consult this database, or to ask any further questions regarding the post-Roman phase of the site, please feel free to contact me.

Kirsten Jarrett, University of Sheffield, prp99kj@sheffield.ac.uk

Subscriptions and Standing Orders

The annual subscription is £20 and is due on the 1st February each year.

Current members – if you need to amend or re-set up your standing order please do not use the form on the website. This is for new members, though our procedures are under review, and it can lead to some confusion if members already on the list use it. All you need are our bank details which are:
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Sort code: 16 23 32
The Royal Bank of Scotland, 13 Stonebow Centre, Lincoln LN2 1DQ

If you would prefer to fill in a new form, please contact the treasurer and you will be sent one (with our bank details already inserted) which you can send direct to your bank.

Could member’s transfering their standing orders between bank accounts or setting up new ones, please also make sure that their name is attached to the BAC transaction. This usually happens automatically but anonymous payments have begun to appear on our statements in the last two years. This leads to obvious problems keeping track of member’s subscriptions, not to mention harrassment of those who have already paid.
The study of the Harlow pottery industry and its distinctive products has been long awaited. Centred around Potter Street, Harlow, on the western edge of Essex, the industry was in operation from the 13th to 18th centuries but it is the wares of the 17th century that are best known, in particular Metropolitan slipware. This highly decorated ware is found on excavations as far flung as London, Newcastle upon Tyne, Dublin and the colonies of North America. The Harlow kilns and their products have been researched, recorded and collected by a number of dedicated local enthusiasts since the 1950s when Harlow New Town was being constructed; pre-eminent amongst these has been Wally Davey. In collaboration with Helen Walker of Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit, with grant funding from English Heritage and the support and encouragement of Harlow Museum Wally has now brought into the public domain years of accumulated knowledge of this important pottery industry.

The report examines four groups of Metropolitan slipware production waste with the aim of characterising the products and enabling Harlow slipwares found at consumer sites to be identified and more closely dated than before. The origins and affinities of the Metropolitan slipware industry are also examined. The other products of the Harlow industries are covered in more summary form including: the evidence for a medieval industry, a typology of the 15th to 16th-century transitional wares, a typology of the blackglazed wares and the examination of a discrete group of plain redwares. There are also sections on the technology and organisation of the industry. A large body of documentary evidence for the Harlow potters has been uncovered, which sheds light on various aspects of the study, from sourcing the raw materials to marketing the finished product. The report also presents the results of petrological and scientific analysis of fabrics and glazes.

A4 format, 198 pp, paperback. Price incl p&p: UK £16; Europe £18; USA £21. Cheques in sterling should be made payable to ‘Medieval Pottery Research Group’, for other currencies and methods of payment please email treasurer@medievalpottery.org.uk for details and additional charges. Available from Lyn Blackmore, Museum of London Archaeology, Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7ED. An order form can be printed off from the MPRG website.