# MEDIEVAL AND LATER POTTERY RESEARCH GROUP

Registered Charity no. 1018513

Newsletter **94** **December 2021**

## Notes from the President

Council met for the final time in 2021 on 30 November. Our new Treasurer (Mike Brace) and Membership Secretary (Clare McCutcheon) are now well entrenched in their roles and all is now running fairly smoothly – please see elsewhere in this newsletter for a note from them on the need to keep us updated with your records. The UK's recent departure from the EU has led to the imposition of customs charges in a somewhat random manner across the Continent – this has had the biggest impact on our Belgian members who have been suddenly faced with large bills for the receipt of the latest volume of Medieval Ceramics – we hope to be able to circumvent these charges for future mailings but in the meantime we apologise sincerely for the inconvenience. Council also discussed the updating of our current list of Medieval Ceramics online, and we aim to get more volumes accessible. In 2022 we will be looking again at our website to try and maximise the potential to raise our profile and to reach more members.

In 2022, we hope to get back to a more 'normal' life in which a 'live event' conference is possible – see below for a note on our ongoing conference plans. We also hope to resurrect our training sessions next year. Regional Groups are also starting to meet again (see below) – so if you are able, get out there and start talking about pottery!

Lorraine Mepham

## Membership Subscriptions

Seasons Greetings to all members of the MLPRG.

Many thanks to all of you who have responded so quickly and positively to the queries from the Membership Secretary and Treasurer as we try to bring the subscriptions, addresses and emails up to date.

For those of you already paying by standing order either by bank transfer or by Paypal, very many thanks and please check your records to show that £30 is being paid out as close to 1st February as possible. It would also be great if you would let us know any quirky nickname that you may have on your account so that it can be correctly matched to your subscriptions. For those paying on a more sporadic basis, please set up a standing order or Paypal regular amount, it makes it much easier for us to keep clear track of anyone.

For our members in Belgium, there has been a real problem with BelgianPost (and one in Sweden) charging a very large fee for the delivery of the Newport kilns monograph. We plan to send the next journal out to these members labelled as a personal gift as this should avoid exorbitant costs for future mailings.

Mike Brace and Clare McCutcheon

## A Bird in the Hand

Excavations were carried out at 124-128 The Coombe, Dublin in 2016 by Aisling Collins of ACAS (excavations.ie:2018:011, Collins forthcoming). This was a continuation of a previous excavation at 118-123 (Walsh 2012), for a proposed hotel development. The area is in the Liberties of Dublin, south of the city wall and diagonally across from St Patrick's Cathedral.

The most outstanding ceramic item on this site is the recovery of a complete finial in the shape of a bird (16E80:162:33, Figure 1), possibly a dove. The piece was made in the local micaceous clay and is unglazed apart from a couple of spatters of glaze. The bird is hollow with a hole in the chest, and the method of construction is also clear from the two detached wings. The hole in the belly suggests use as a finial as the bird could be mounted onto a wooden spike onto the roof where it would have looked

at its realistic best. A hollow body was made with a flared tail, head and wings then attached. The flared tail has the wings laid back onto the tail but not flattened into the body. According to an experienced pigeon racer friend, this indicates that the bird has just settled on the roof from flight and gives it a very lively and realistic appearance. Apart from the purely ceramic interest, it is a very joyous item as the bird fits into the palm of the hand, bringing a wonderful smile with each new person that holds it.

No other similar item has been found in the literature although birds are a typical feature on roofs in Belgium (Jan de Groote pers. comm.). In fact, the birds in Belgium are very different from those found at the Coombe, as they have no wings other than a faint line and also sit on top of a funnel (Figure 2).

Of course, like all good ceramic finds, when one is found there is sure to be another and a pair of detached wings from a second bird (Figure 3) were found on the same site, just two(!) good to be true.

**References:**


Collins, A. forthcoming *'Excavations at 124-128 The Coombe, Dublin'.*

De Groote, J. & Moens, J. (eds) 2018 *Archaeology and history of a medieval residential area under the Hopmarkt in Aalst.* Relicta Monograph **16**.

Walsh, C. 2012 'The excavation of an early roadway and Hiberno-Norse houses at the Coombe', in S. Duffy (ed.) *Medieval Dublin XII*, 113-37.


*Figure 2 – Modern bird shaped roof finials (above) and 14th century bird-shaped finial (below), DeGroote & Moens 2018 .*


*Figure 1 – Bird-shaped finial from Dublin. Images by Kevin Weldon (ACAS).*


*Figure 3 – Detatched wings of second bird (left). Photo by Clare McCutcheon.*

Clare McCutcheon

## MLPRG Conference 2022

No details are available yet for next year's conference, but our plan is to hold a 'live event' 3-day conference in the autumn (September or October), somewhere in the UK – we are currently investigating possible venues. At the moment the course of the current pandemic still seems uncertain, so this gives us more time to assess conditions. If at all possible, we will make this a 'hybrid' conference so that members can join us online if they wish.

Look out for more information in the New Year.

Lorraine Mepham

## Somerset Pottery Fabric Type Series (Medieval and Post-Medieval)

Historic England have awarded the South West Heritage Trust funding for a new project to create a Somerset Pottery Fabric Type Series (Medieval and Post-Medieval) and make it accessible online. The project is being carried out in collaboration with pottery specialist David Dawson and in partnership with the Medieval and Later Pottery Research Group.

One of the most exciting aspects of the project is the recruitment of an Archaeological Pottery Specialist on a two-day per week nineteen-month fixed term contract. We are pleased to report that Naomi Payne has been appointed. Naomi is currently Finds Manager at AC Archaeology and will also continue in this role. She will have the opportunity to be mentored by a network of Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery specialists and take part in a bespoke training programme.

*Naomi Payne*

Naomi will focus on creating a catalogue of all the different fabric types of Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery found in Somerset. One sherd of each type of pottery will be selected for inclusion in the type series. The material it is made of will be described in detail in the catalogue. Information about each pottery sherd and images will then be made available online.

This project is part of a wider national initiative to improve the standard of the interpretation of pottery as archaeological evidence. The aim is that the Somerset Pottery Fabric Type Series will become an essential point of reference for archaeologists working in the county. As part of the project a series of training days will be held for different stakeholders, including archaeological contractors and community archaeologists.

*Nicky Amos and Pete Missingham from the Westbury-sub-Mendip Archaeology Group visiting the Somerset Heritage Centre to take a look at the pottery type series from Fosse Lane, Shepton Mallet.*

For further information please contact Amal Khreisheh (Curator of Archaeology, South West Heritage Trust) on 01823 347443 or email amal.khreisheh@swheritage.org.uk.

David Dawson

## South West Regional Meeting at Wells and Mendip Museum

The 'live' meeting was held on Saturday 16th October by courtesy of the Wells Pottery Study Group and the trustees and managers of Wells and Mendip Museum. We met according to 'Drakenford' rules i.e. laterally flow-tested, wearing face-masks, sanitising our hands, and eating individually wrapped biscuits. We were advised that the risk of transmitting the virus between people by touching potsherds is tiny provided you sanitise your hands afterwards and before touching your nose or mouth let alone eat. It was delightful for the thirty-odd people who attended to be able to meet in person.

Apart from poring over potsherds, we were treated to six presentations. Amal Khreisheh introduced the HE-funded Somerset Pottery Type Fabric Project and the newly appointed 'trainee', Naomi Payne, who will begin work two-days a week from 1 December. Duncan Brown explained how the project furthered the evolving ambition to realise a national network. Ollie Kent described the outcome of a current study on the impressive group of Chinese export porcelain recovered from excavations in the garden of Wells Museum in 1993-4. John Allan brought us up to date with the pottery elements of the Exeter: a place in Time project and Lorraine Mepham and Briony Lalor offered the grey-literature report on the remarkable 17th-century pottery waste from Crockerton (Wilts) that the late Penny Copland-Griffiths had been instrumental in saving. David and Zillah Savage introduced us to the pottery from recent fieldwork on a medieval croft at Syston (Gloucs). Finally Laurence Keen explained the joys and pitfalls of discussing heraldic encaustic floor tiles with especial reference to those from Nash Hill (Wilts).

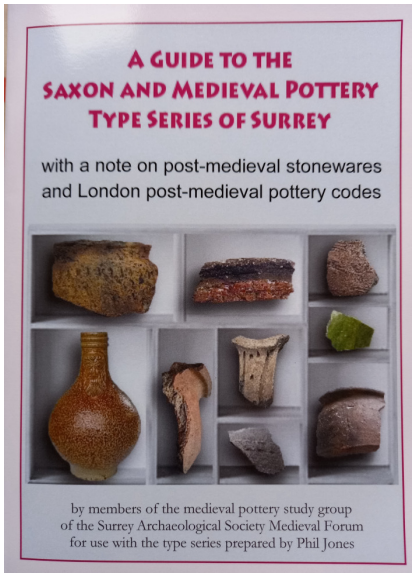
David Dawson and John Allan

## Save the Date – South Central Regional Group Meeting

The South Central Region Group will be meeting on Saturday 14 May 2022 at Salisbury Museum, to view the Laverstock kiln material held by the Museum. Further details will be circulated nearer the event, but if you want to make sure you are on the mailing list please contact Lorraine Mepham, l.mepham@wessexarch.co.uk.

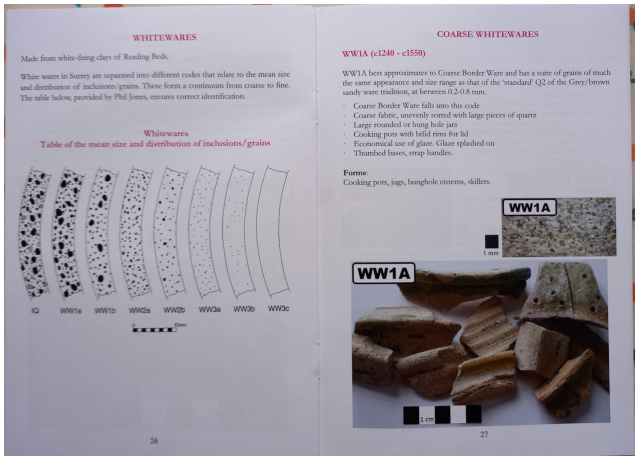
Lorraine Mepham

## A Guide to the Saxon and Medieval Pottery Types of Surrey




By members of the Surrey Archaeology Society medieval study group, using the type series by Phil Jones.

This excellent 40pp A5 guide describes the Surrey pottery types and their fabric codes, both in descriptive text, with accurate fabric photographs and circa date ranges. It will be most useful for ceramicists both at desk and in the field.




*Sample of pages from the guide.*

Copies are available at £5 + £1 p&p by cheque from The Librarian, Surrey Archaeology Society, Hackhurst Lane, Abinger Hammer, Surrey RH5 6SE.

Overseas members should email the librarian at librarian@surreyarchaeology.org.uk for cost of postage.

Mike Brace

# A Possible Medieval Pottery Production Site at Binfield, Berkshire

An excavation at Tilehurst Lane, Binfield, near Bracknell, carried out by Steve Ford of Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd in August 2021, uncovered a concentrated group of pottery. There were 1323 sherds of high medieval date, the majority of which were coarsewares in three main fabric groups which appear to be of local manufacture. The group included a number of wasters exhibiting typical traits such as overfiring, underfiring, warping, cracking, unfused glaze, glaze on broken edges, vitrification and spalling. These sherds were particularly concentrated in two contexts, a gully (391 sherds) and a pit (445 sherds), but waster sherds also occurred in several other nearby contexts.

The group has been divided into three main fabric types, although these are really a continuum of very fine to coarsely sand-tempered wares and the attribution of some of the 'in-between' sherds to a particular fabric group is subjective. The fabrics are as follows:

**BIN1**: well-sorted quartz sand up to 0.5mm, sparse rounded and sub-rounded coarse quartz up to 2mm, sparse to moderate fine soft red clay pellets and/or ferrous oxide, rare angular flint, rare rounded chalk in some sherds (generally very fine), streaky/laminated section. 1053 sherds, 7605g, ENV 996.

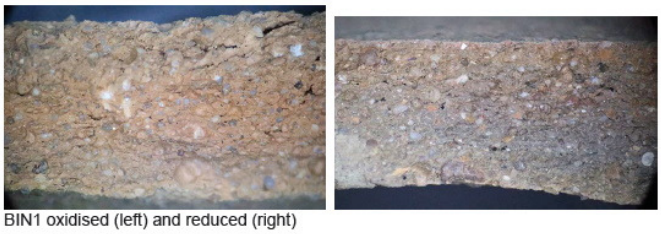
**BIN2**: ill-sorted fine to coarse quartz sand and a larger component of rounded and sub-rounded coarse quartz, other inclusions as BIN1. 103 sherds, 953g, ENV 99.

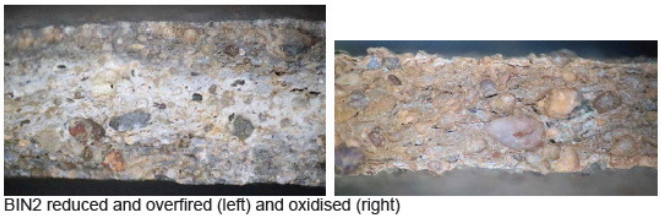
**BIN3:** abundant very fine silt-sized to fine quartz sand, mainly visible in section only due to smoothing of the surfaces, sparse to moderate fine soft red clay pellets/ferrous oxide, very few or no obvious coarse inclusions. 138 sherds, 990g, ENV 133.

Some sherds were glazed, and where the colour could be determined, the glaze was green in colour, and there were no additives such as copper. Apart from glazing, there was no definite evidence of decoration in the group.

The main jar rim type was a flaring form, generally with a slightly rounded outer edge (although sometimes this was a more pronounced bead) and a narrow area of deliberate flattening at the tip, sometimes appearing as a slight internal bevel. Amongst the few jugs, a short tapering rim, sometimes with a lid-seating, was the most frequent type. Bowl rims were closely similar to those of jars and were only identifiable where part of the body was also present. Both skillets had inturned rims with internal thickening and bevelling. All bases were sagging types, with the possible exception of one flat example, probably from a glazed vessel. Handles were either wide straps or tapering straight types.

Known production sites in this region are rare, with Camley Gardens, Maidenhead and Ashampstead being the only published examples from Berkshire. Both kilns appear to belong to the first half of the 13th century. The apparent lack of any decoration on the Binfield vessels, together with the minimalist glazing of the jugs, suggests a later medieval date for this assemblage. A radiocarbon date was obtained from pine charcoal associated with the pottery, and provided a date of cal AD 1272–1304 at 82.9% probability (UBA46475).


BIN1 oxidised (left) and reduced (right)


BIN2 reduced and overfired (left) and oxidised (right)


BIN3 reduced

*Binfield fabrics.*

We hope that the site and the pottery assemblage will be published in Berkshire Archaeological Journal in 2023.

Sue Anderson

Lorraine Mepham adds: By one of those strange synchronicities that sometimes happen in archaeology, I can offer some additional information to Sue Anderson's article. Earlier this year Wessex Archaeology dug a site a

few miles to the south-west of Binfield which produced similar, although more ambiguous evidence. A large deposit of pottery in a shallow gully included sherds which I thought might be wasters, though the signs were limited to surface spalling, with no evidence of warping or other firing faults. From Sue's descriptions, our fabrics seem to be comparable in composition and in date range (13th-century). Hopefully at some stage we'll be able to do some comparative analysis. This new information is all the more pleasing as east Berkshire has always been something of a 'black hole' as far as possible pottery production was concerned and it's nice to be able to fill in part of the gap!

Lorraine Mepham

## Some Possible Pottery Wasters from Clarendon Palace

Some of you may be familiar with the site of Clarendon Palace, just to the east of Salisbury, Wiltshire. The palace, now a rather sad-looking ruin but still in the middle of an extensive estate, was once the haunt of royalty and the greatest deer park in England from the 12th century. In the early 13th century Henry III converted the existing Romanesque palace to Gothic splendour – this refurbishment and royal occupation was undoubtedly one of the major stimuli to the establishment of the Laverstock pottery kilns which lie midway between the palace and the city of Salisbury, founded in the 1220s. The lavishly tiled floors of the palace were apparently supplied by an on-site tile kiln which was re-excavated by Elizabeth Eames following its initial discovery in the 1930s.

*Figure 1 - Jug base waster from Clarendon Palace.*

Most recently, Professor Tom James of Winchester University dug two small trenches at Clarendon in 2019, and kindly invited me to look at the pottery, of which there were just over 1000 sherds. It was much as expected – a selection of Laverstock-type coarsewares and finewares, the latter including some elaborately slip-decorated jugs. But a few pieces stood out, and it became apparent that there was a small group of sherds that showed firing faults, including at least one definite 'waster' in the form of two jug bases stuck together (Figure 1). Other sherds showed firing cracks and degraded glazes (Figure 2).


*Figure 2 - Pipkin foot possible waster from Clarendon.*

The puzzle is what these mis-fired sherds were doing at Clarendon – could they have been brought in (perhaps as hardcore) from Laverstock, which is only about 2km to the west? Or do they suggest pottery manufacture at the Palace itself? This is perhaps not such a strange idea when you consider the quantities of pottery that must have been consumed there. In 1268 the sum of 20 shillings was paid for 1000 pitchers (jugs) for the royal household, including a sum for their carriage from Clarendon to Winchester; it has been assumed that these jugs actually came from Laverstock, but in which case why were they transported from Clarendon? One definite outlier from the Laverstock kilns is known in Salisbury, where a late short-lived 13th-/early 14th-century kiln was established on the eastern edge of the city. It is possible

that one or more of the Laverstock potting community set up a short-lived kiln at Clarendon, perhaps for a specific commission – it seems too simplistic to link this to the order for 1000 pitchers in 1268, but it may not be beyond the bounds of possibility. Analysis is continuing.

Lorraine Mepham

## Deborah Sawday (1944 – 2021)

*Photo by Nick Cooper*

It is with great sadness that we report the death on 19 October of Debbie Sawday, after a long illness. Debbie was a long-time MLPRG member. She joined the Leicester County Museum Services Archaeological Field Unit in 1974 and stayed with the University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) when it developed from the Field Unit in 1995. During that time she first worked on excavations and later developed an interest in medieval pottery which she maintained for over 40 years.

She helped to establish the medieval type series for Leicester, and published assemblages from several sites in the city (Sawday 1994; Davies and Sawday 1999). She also wrote the standard reference paper on the local Potters Marston ware (Sawday 1991) and contributed sections on the medieval pottery to the recently published volume *Life in Roman and medieval Leicester* (Buckley *et al*. 2021).

Debbie was an amazingly colourful character, great fun to be around and involved with much more than just pots. She was 'green' before it was fashionable, never owned a car, cycled everywhere and was a passionate campaigner for Friends of the Earth. Colleagues remember Debbie as a fiercely loyal friend and confidante, principled, protective, and very ready to speak her mind when the need arose. Her passing has left a huge hole in the ULAS team and in many people's lives and we will continue to miss her for a very long time to come.

Thanks to Nick Cooper (ULAS) for this summary of Debbie's life; the full obituary he wrote will be reprinted in *Medieval Ceramics* Volume 42

**References:**


Buckley, R., Cooper, N.J. and Morris, M. 2021 *Life in Roman and Medieval Leicester: excavations in the town's north-east quarter, 1958-2006.* Leicester Archaeology Monograph 26. Leicester: University of Leicester Archaeological Services.

Davies, S. and Sawday, D., 1999, 'The post-Roman pottery' in A. Connor and R. Buckley *Roman and Medieval occupation at Causeway Lane, Leicester.* Leicester Archaeological Monographs 5, 165–200

Sawday, D., 1991 'Potters Marston Ware' *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society 65*, 34–7

Sawday, D. 1994 'The post-Roman pottery' in P. Clay and R Pollard, *Roman Occupation in the West Bridge Area, Leicester: Excavation 1962-71*, 115-130. Leicester: Leicestershire County Council Museums, Arts and Records Service

# MPRG Publications

**Occasional Paper 1**: A Guide to the Classification of Medieval Ceramic forms (UK £27.75 excl. P&P)
Online digital version: https://medievalpottery.org.uk/publications/occasional-papers/a-guide-to-the-classification-of-medieval-ceramic-forms/

**Occasional Paper 2:** Minimum Standards for the Processing, Recording, Analysis and Publication of Post-Roman Ceramics (Free excl. P&P This publication has been replaced by **A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology** see below)

**Occasional Paper 3:** *The Harlow Pottery Industries*, by Helen Walker and Wally Davey (UK £16; Europe £18; USA £21: All include P&P)

**Occasional Paper 4:** *'Genius in a Cracked Pot' - Late Medieval Reduced Wares: A Regional Synthesis*, by Anna Slowikowski (UK £12; Europe £14: All include P&P)

**Occasional Paper 5:** *Sourcing Scottish Redwares*, by Derek Hall, George Haggarty and Simon Chenerey (UK £22.50; Europe: £24: All include P&P)

**Occasional Paper 6:** A Research Framework for Post-Roman Ceramic Studies in Britain
https://medievalpottery.org.uk/publications/occasional-papers/occasional-paper-6-mprg-framework/

**Occasional Paper 7:** *The Ipswich Ware Project. Ceramics, Trade and Society in Middle Saxon England*, by Paul Blinkhorn *et al*. (UK £16; Europe £20: All include P&P)

**Occasional Paper 8:** *Ceramics and Glass: a tribute to Sarah Jennings.* Julie Edwards and Sarah Paynter (eds). (UK £20; Europe £26: All include P&P)

**Occasional Paper 9:** *Late Medieval Pottery Kilns at Newport, Pembrokeshire, and the Recording and Interpretation of Pottery Production Sites.* David Dawson and Oliver Kent. (Distributed *gratis* to MLPRG members)

**A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology - Online Digital Version:**
https://medievalpottery.org.uk/home/a-standard-for-pottery-studies-in-archaeology/

Back issues of Medieval Ceramics up to volume 32 and still in stock are available at £1; please contact Lyn Blackmore lblackmore@mola.org.uk to order. Out of print volumes are free to download from: https://medievalpottery.org.uk/medieval-ceramics-online Currently volumes 1-25; 28-31 and 33 are available, and more will be added soon.

# MPRG Contacts

**Wondering who to contact regarding your enquiry?**

- Membership enquiries or to notify of change of address: Membership Secretary
- Contributions to Medieval Ceramics: the Editors
- Contributions to the newsletter: Assistant Secretary
- Matters for consideration by the Council at Council meetings: Secretary
- Purchase of back issues and Occasional Papers - Lyn Blackmore (lblackmore@mola.org.uk)

For anything else:

**General** Medieval Pottery Research Group, c/o MoLA, Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7ED

**Hon Secretary** **Gareth Perry**
*e-mail:secretary@medievalpottery.org.uk*

**President** **Lorraine Mepham**
*e-mail: l.mepham@wessexarch.co.uk*
*e-mail:president@medievalpottery.org.uk*
*phone: 07825 776099*

**Hon Treasurer** **Mike Brace**
*e-mail:treasurer@medievalpottery.org.uk*

**Assistant Treasurer** **Sam Rowe**
*e-mail: assistant.treasurer@medievalpottery.org.uk*

**Assistant Secretary** **David Budge**
*e-mail: assistant.secretary@medievalpottery.org.uk*

**Editors** **Lyn Blackmore and Stephanie Ratkai**
*e-mail: editor@medievalpottery.org.uk*

**Membership Secretary** **Clare McCutcheon**
*e-mail: membership@medievalpottery.org.uk*

Additional contacts may be found on the website.

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