

Delftware directions

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THE STUDY OF London's delftware industry took a major step forward with the publication of *London Delftware*¹. It is two books in one: a survey of the evidence for delftware potteries around London, and a catalogue of London delftware, mostly from the Museum of London's collection, but also from the City of Bristol Art Gallery and the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

The first part consists of short histories of nineteen potteries, from (geographically) Rotherhithe to Isleworth, preceded by a brief introduction to the technology of delftware production and the 'Genesis and Exodus' of the north European industry, centred on Antwerp but of Italian origin. The histories contain much new evidence, especially from the records of the Hand-in-Hand Insurance Company, giving the size and functions of the various buildings within the potteries. It is clear that some were very substantial businesses, with premises of up to several thousand square feet. The maps are a very valuable addition, showing as much as is known about each pottery (from a detailed plan in some cases to a simple "site of" in others), superimposed on Rocque's map of 1746. Watercolours of Griffith's Lambeth High Street pottery and the Vauxhall pottery bring these sites to life. I especially liked the way in which the author seeks to break new ground in preference to covering familiar territory², and his critical approach to his documentary sources. It is good to see the up-river potteries – Putney, Mortlake and Isleworth – given due weight. There are one or two points with which one might disagree, such as the location of the Pickleherring pottery, which on Fig. 4 (p. 34) is shown in Vine Yard, despite an advertisement of 1722/3 (p. 37) describing it as "An old-accustomed working Pot-house, in Stony Lane".

Perhaps the biggest problem presented by this section of the book is the status of the Aldgate pottery. The author sees it as a major influence in the development of the industry, starting in 1571 under Jacob Jansen, continuing under Toussain Lap and lasting until c 1615, so overlapping in date with with earliest Southwark potteries. There were apparently thirteen potters, all of Flemish origin, working at Aldgate in this period. The archaeological evidence scarcely supports this picture. Small quantities of biscuit wasters are known from Aldgate³ and Bastion 6⁴, but the only definite glazed wasters of this date are those from the Holy Trinity Priory (1979) excavation⁵, which caused much surprise by their unfamiliarity in both form and decoration, and such vessels are extremely rare in excavated groups. If the pottery was really in production for some 40 years, then one would expect examples of its distinctive wares to be well known from City and other local excavations (even if they had been

wrongly attributed to Antwerp). Either the Holy Trinity Priory wasters are atypical of production there, or production was on a much smaller scale than suggested by the author. It is worth noting that the HTP material contained wasters of red earthenware, so perhaps delftware was only a proportion of the production of the Aldgate pottery.

The catalogue illustrates a wide range of vessel forms and decorative styles, as well as some less usual examples, like decorative tile panels (see front cover), figurines and even a clock case. Many 'old favourites' are present, like the *Rose is red* charger and the *James & Elizabeth Greene* mug (both in colour as well as black-and-white), but there are also many less familiar vessels, including the less-published plain forms, and a good range of examples from the Vauxhall excavation. Rather puzzling is the inclusion of a series of 'early Netherlandish' altar vases, here attributed to Antwerp or Aldgate, although previous writers⁶ have given them a pre-Dissolution or early to mid 16th century date. The author has not attempted to attribute vessels to specific potteries, his most precise definition being 'Southwark' for vessels dating to a period when no other local pottery was in production.

One must mention a unique document given here as Appendix III – the inventory of Nathaniel Oade, potter, of Gravel Lane, Southwark, who died in 1726. This itemises and values a stock of over 100,000 vessels, as well as a great deal of materials and equipment (down to "2 Kiln Ladders and 3 planks").

Mr Britton has done a great service in pulling together a subject which in the past has tended to polarise into 'dirt archaeology' and 'art historical' wings. He has summarised the available evidence for potters and potteries in our area, and given a cross-section of production (at least as it is reflected in the Museum of London's collection). The inevitable question is – where do we go from here? The answer, as the author hints, is not in attempting to make more precise attributions to specific potteries (confounded by the itinerant behaviour of some of the potters), nor perhaps in seeking to refine chronologies (if only because of the 'heirloom factor' of some of the material). The main need is for the publication of large coherent groups, both from production sites and also domestic groups (e.g. from cesspits), the latter taking into account other pottery and material such as glassware. Given that basic information, we can start to study delftware in its context as an apparently widespread but 'luxury' product. We need to know what it meant in its domestic setting, what it was 'saying' to its purchasers and their neighbours. In other words, we must learn to 'read' it as well as Mr Britton and his predecessors have read the documentary sources.

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1. *London Delftware*, by Frank Britton. Jonathan Horne, 66c Kensington Church Street, London W8 4BY, 1987. 202pp., 250pl., 21 colour pl., 9 maps, bibliog., index. £40.
2. Such as Rhoda Edwards, 'London Potters circa 1570-1710' *J Ceram Hist* 6 (1974) and I. Noël Hume *Early English Delftware from London and Virginia* (1977).
3. A. Thompson *et al* 'Excavations at Aldgate, 1974' *Post-*

4. Noël Hume *op cit* fn 2, 111-8.

5. B. Richardson 'Excavation Round-up 1979' *London Archaeol* 3 no. 14 (1980) 384-9.

6. E.g. I. Noël Hume *op cit* fn 2, 13 pl. 4 and 118, no. 16; S. Jennings *Eighteen centuries of pottery from Norwich* The Norwich Survey (1981) no. 1424.