

Books

German Stoneware 1200-1900, by David Gaimster. *British Museum Press*, 1997. 430 pp., 40 colour and 500 black-and-white illus., bibliog., index. £40.

GERMAN stoneware is one of the all-time ceramic success stories. After much experimentation with clays and firing techniques, the production of fully-fused stoneware was finally achieved in Europe around 1300

AD in the Rhineland. The ensuing products captured a large slice of the northern European market for pottery in the course of the next two centuries, being robust, impervious to liquids, and attractive to the eye, capable of almost any function except cooking. In the 16th century production shifted from mass production of high-quality but basically plain utilitarian wares to more limited production of highly decorated wares; in the

(continued on p. 249)

Finds

The pottery recovered from the southern ditch and the features cut into it, comprised 40 sherds, the majority of which are of 11th to mid-12th-century date. Most come from just two vessels in early medieval chalk-tempered fabric (EMCH), one with vertical applied thumbled strip decoration, and the other, possibly a large storage jar with horizontal applied thumbled strip decoration around the shoulder. In addition, two rim sherds were found of late Saxon shelly ware (LSS) of mid-9th to 11th century date. Other sherds in a variety of fabrics were found, mostly within the date range 1050-1150, and all within the range 950-1350, producing a cohesive assemblage of 11th to mid-12th-century pottery.

Animal bone was also recovered from the early medieval features. Ditch 22 contained some cattle bone fragments, as well as the articulated horse leg mentioned above. Cattle and horse bones, as well as the tooth of a sheep, also occurred in the southern ditch and the features cut into it (contexts 1-7).

Discussion

Early medieval

Documentary research has been undertaken into the history of the Old Ford area on behalf of the Tower Hamlets Action Trust³; the results of this excavation appear to confirm the results of that research. It is suggested⁴ that the settlement at Old Ford grew up in the 11th century in association with the establishment of a mill on the other side of the river Lea⁵, but that the settlement had diminished by 1303 after the ford had become difficult, and a new road had been established to the south with new bridges over the river, at the instigation of Queen Matilda. This dating ties closely with the pottery dates, which concentrate

in the 11th to mid-12th centuries. The project has therefore been useful in confirming archaeologically the nature of early medieval activity in the area, as suggested by documentary research. A hint at the nature of this activity is provided by the large quantities of animal bone found, along with burnt cereal grains⁶. Both suggest that domestic settlement was not far away.

In addition to the discoveries on this site, further evidence of this medieval activity has been found elsewhere; ditches identified as field boundaries were also uncovered at Morville Street, 300m to the south of Ruston Street⁷.

Post-medieval

After the early medieval activity on the site, there is evidence of more intensive post-medieval activity, in the form of building rubble and foundations in a date range from the 15th to 18th centuries. The metal-working debris recovered from context 10 was also dated to the early post-medieval period. Extensive use of the woodland covering Victoria Park at this period is known from documentary sources⁸; this nearby fuel source may have contributed to the possible metal working on the site. It is not possible however to characterise this activity further.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank SIBMAR Construction Co. Ltd. for their help with this project, both in funding and practically on the site, in particular Stan Sibthorpe and Ian Pugh. The preparation of this report was funded by Landmark Housing Association Ltd. I would also like to thank Lawrence Pontin of English Heritage for his assistance. Project management was provided by John Moore and Dominic Perring, excavation was carried out

3. G. Brown *Archaeological desk-top assessment of possible development sites in and adjacent to the H.A.T. Designated Area TQ3657 8343* (1994) Pre-Construct Archaeology, unpublished.

4. *Ibid.*, 28.

5. Recorded in the Domesday Book as the mill of Algot.

6. Recovered from environmental samples.

7. *Op cit* fn 3, 28.

8. *Ibid.*, 29.

17th century we see a comeback with the ubiquitous bellarmine bottles. In the late 17th century the British market was finally reclaimed by indigenous stoneware and glass products.

Stoneware pots from German sources – Siegburg, Langerwehe, Raeren, Cologne, Frechen and Westerwald – are known from sites of all types in late medieval and early post-medieval Britain. Collectively, they are probably the most widely distributed type of contemporary pottery, both geographically and socially. So anyone working on sites of these periods needs to know something about these wares, if only to identify the main sources. Until now, this has not been easy, since the standard work, a catalogue from a Cologne museum, was published (in German) in 1976 and is not easily available.

In the first half of this comprehensive survey, David Gaimster looks at German stoneware, from both familiar and unfamiliar sources, from several distinct points of view: archaeological, technological, historical, art-historical and sociological. This builds up a picture, not only of what the pottery was like and how it was made, but also of what it might have meant, in functional and symbolic terms. The second part consists of a catalogue of the stoneware of these periods in the British Museum, Museum of London and Victoria and Albert Museum, organised by the main centres of production. Each section is preceded by a short account of that centre. There are many illustrations (some in colour) to help readers identify and date their material, but hopefully they will not stop there. They will have no excuse for not thinking further about its social implications.

This book is excellent value for money, thanks to a generous grant from Ceramica-Stiftung of Basle. Some of the colour illustrations are dark and/or oddly lit, making it difficult to see the finer detail of decoration, but the black-and-white photography is excellent. The extensive bibliography provides a springboard for future research. Anyone working on, or interested in, the transition from medieval to modern Europe, should have a copy.

Clive Orton

Excavations at the Priory and Hospital of St Mary Spital, London, by Christopher Thomas; Barney Sloane & Christopher Phillpotts. *MOLAS Monograph 1*, 1997. 280pp; 114 figs, 81 tables, index, bibliography. £32.

OUR MODERN hospitals, though perhaps different in many ways, are nevertheless one of the few remaining legacies of our now lost monastic heritage.

Even though there were as many as a thousand such institutions active in the medieval period in England and Wales, the importance of the hospital in medieval society, as both a sanctuary for the elderly, homeless and the sick, and as a focus for charitable patronage, has been largely overlooked.

The recent series of excavations carried out at St. Mary Spital, London, perhaps amongst one of the largest hospitals in London, has sought to redress the balance and see the medieval hospital not just as one aspect of monasticism but as a separate, though related, study area in its own right. It reveals the changing nature of the hospital within medieval society and how these changes are represented within the archaeological record.

The report on excavations at St. Mary Spital forms the first part of a series of related reports on the medieval monasteries of London, and comprises the most comprehensive archaeological study of any medieval hospital to date. The report has a user-friendly format. Free of unnecessary jargon, it provides a highly accessible approach to the evidence, synthesising the relevant data within a logical and coherent framework. This approach comprises a chronological narrative, discussing the excavated evidence in the context of chronological periods; thematic sections, comprising related essays considering, for example, the evidence for the hospital inhabitants and living conditions, the urban context of the priory and hospital, and the fragmentation of the site after the dissolution.

Though concentrating on the recent excavations of the site, the study also considers previous recording work carried out in the 1930s, and also looks to the future, offering further research aims and a detailed and relevant bibliography with particular reference to the research archive.

The volume also includes specialist sections dealing with the related artefactual and environmental evidence to further illustrate the activities of both the inhabitants, and the people associated with the priory and hospital.

The written report is supported by a range of tables and illustrations which on the whole complement the report. The plans, which show the development of the hospital and priory during the medieval period, and the range of tables illustrating such aspects as diet and human remains, are particularly clear and informative. Though it could be said that perhaps more illustrations, especially with regard to both the artefacts and moulded stone fragments, could have been used to further demonstrate the wide range and importance of such finds.

With all things considered the report provides a highly informative and much needed study of an important medieval hospital in its religious and urban context. Its use of thematic essays and its chronological framework provide an easily accessible, and dare I say, more interesting approach to the relevant data, making this work of value to both the archaeologist and general reader alike. It is hoped that such a report will also be a valuable prototype for other forthcoming volumes in this series which together will provide a long awaited insight into some of London's former medieval monastic establishments.

Simon Roffey