

# Alan Vince 1952–2009

Mike Hughes remembers one of Britain's foremost ceramics specialists

The brief CV on Alan's website is entirely typical: it is jokey, and takes the reader on a short tour of the various institutions for which he had worked, then left, and which collapsed shortly after. The picture is of falling masonry as Alan escaped. In those web pages he created instead his own 'institution', and it is one of his abiding legacies. It contains a massive database of work completed, including copies of the reports produced and, practically uniquely, the original scientific data on which the reports are based. He combined the skills of a pottery specialist, a (self-taught) thin-section petrologist, interpreter of chemical analysis on archaeological ceramics, and organizer and designer of websites.

Born in Bath, his early years were spent in nearby Keynsham. He studied at Southampton University 1970–78 where, under the influence of David Peacock, the application of geological techniques to pottery studies was opened to him. He was awarded his PhD there in 1983; his first appointment was as Urban Archaeologist with the Berkshire Archaeological Unit 1978–80. His long association with London began in 1980 when he was appointed as Finds Supervisor at the Department of Urban Archaeology, Museum of London, where I first met him in the early '80s. At the DUA until 1988, he made a key contribution to the development of pottery studies in London. He was a founder author and co-author of the major series of publications on London pottery: 'A Dated Type Series of London Pottery:...' (Mill Green Ware, London-Type Ware, Border Ware, Surrey Whiteware), published by the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society.

His popular book *Saxon London* tells the story of the discovery, made simultaneously but independently by himself and Prof. Martin Biddle, that Saxon London lay west of the Roman walls, along the Strand and Aldwych ('the old wic'). In 1991 he co-authored a major paper on the Saxon and early medieval pottery of London in a volume

of the LAMAS report on *Aspects of Saxon and Norman London* which he edited. This publication is richly illustrated with thin-section photomicrographs, in which he became a specialist, often calling in to the British Museum Research Laboratory in London to discuss matters petrological.

He moved to Lincoln in 1988 to the City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit, and later took a part-time post at the University of York, during which time (1997) he founded his consultancy at Lincoln and changed, from 1999, to full-time consultancy work.

He wrote *Pottery in Archaeology* with Clive Orton and Paul Tyers, in which his chapters form a practical manual on the processing, cataloguing and publication of excavated pottery. They are a how-to-do-it study, full of judicious advice based on his accumulated experience.

He was a pioneer in the use of computer technology in pottery research; he could quickly search the pottery database on his computer to locate details on specific sherds. He carried around in former days an early Psion PDA, built on the brick-like dimensions of the first cell phones we now find amusing in 1990s films. The text of his doctoral thesis (*The Medieval Ceramic Industry of the Severn Valley*) was stored in there somewhere as were his pottery databases. The skills he developed in web publishing led him to become the first managing editor of *Internet Archaeology* from 1995–99.

His consultancy work had from the beginning incorporated the scientific study of pottery using thin section petrology, along the pattern used in the London 'Dated Series...' volumes. His early pioneering work in the additional inclusion in his reports of chemical analysis of the fabric using ICP (Inductively-Coupled Plasma spectrometry) has accumulated 4–5000 ICP analyses – a huge database, mostly on British material, but with significant numbers from other northern European countries. He was generous in sharing these unpublished reports and the

original datasets of analyses – key material for others to use as reference material. This database is a significant benefaction and key resource to the archaeology community, and testifies to his major contribution to the development of the subject.

His website is an ambitious and successful application of web technology to organise and make available his store-house of scholarly work. The clickable maps enable the user to find rapidly relevant local projects, to see and download the reports available which include at least some of the original data. The whole is a joy to use and quite staggering in the breadth and number of reports available.

Although he moved to Lincoln for the latter part of his life, he was a frequent visitor to the capital and kept in touch with his former colleagues. Among national organisations, he made major contributions to the Society for Medieval Archaeology (Secretary 1988–93), the Ceramic Petrology Group and the Medieval Pottery Research Group (President 1996–99), which has dedicated to his memory a meeting on 'Science and Ceramics' at the British Geological Survey, Keyworth, on Saturday 6th June 2009. He was an excellent judge of an idea for projects which would benefit from scientific investigation – to move the identification of the place of production of a pottery sherd beyond opinions based on visual characteristics alone. It was his original suggestion to set up the scientific projects to source by chemical analysis the range of imports of medieval and later tin-glazed pottery into London, including Spanish lustrewares and Low Countries tin-glazed wares. These successful and fruitful investigations have since continued with Italian wares and (most recently) the study of London delftwares. He contributed to the monograph on Metropolitan slipwares about to be published (see last issue of LA, in Mosaic p. 88).

Personal memories are of a warm, humorous, generous man, and who was very good company. Alan is irreplaceable and the numbers of people within archaeology who have been affected by the news of his illness and untimely death are testament to his wide influence.