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FIG. 1. MEDIEVAL POTTERY AT BODIAM.

THE MEDIEVAL POTTERY AT BODIAM CASTLE

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IN 1919 when the late Lord Curzon drained and excavated the moat and carried out other extensive operations at Bodiam Castle a quantity of objects of the medieval and later periods was found, and these are now housed in the small Museum attached to the Castle. Amongst them were many fragments of pottery, and these include parts of between fifty and sixty vessels of medieval character. The purpose of the present paper is to publish drawings and descriptions of the more complete of these pieces, and thanks are due to the Bodiam Castle Committee, which now administers the property under the National Trust, and especially to the Secretary, Mr. Hugh Whistler, for permitting and encouraging this publication. The reference numbers on the drawings are those of the recently compiled catalogue of the objects in Bodiam Museum and are here employed to facilitate identification of the pieces illustrated.

Bodiam Castle was built in the years following 1386, and the main interest of the pottery lies in this fact: for while unfortunately no proper record was kept during the excavations of the exact position of the objects as they turned up, the bulk of the pottery appears to have come from the moat and is thus with some certainty subsequent to the building of the Castle. On the other hand, all the pieces illustrated with one or two possible exceptions are likely to be pre-Tudor on typological grounds. We have thus a group of pottery datable without much doubt to the century following 1386, and even those wide limits introduce greater precision than is possible in the material from many medieval sites. In the present state of our knowledge of medieval pottery it may be worth while to put on record such a representative series of the ceramic forms in use in a baronial household in the fifteenth century.

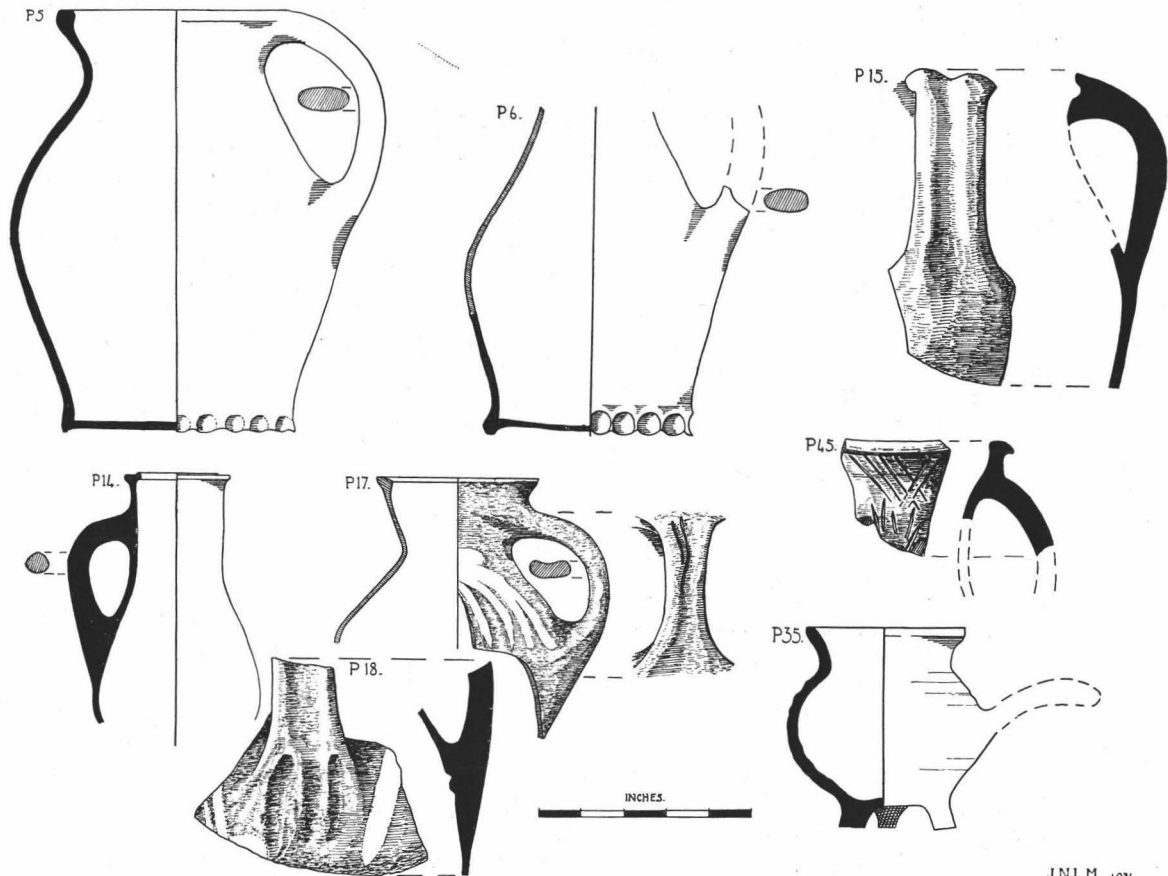


FIG. 2. MEDIEVAL POTTERY AT BODIAM.

Little need be said to supplement the descriptions which accompany the illustrations. The bulk of the collection consists of handled pitchers of different shapes varying from the slimmer types reminiscent of an earlier age to the wide-bellied forms characteristic of the fifteenth century (Figs. 1, 2, and 3). The handles are mostly plain or slightly grooved and with one or two exceptions (P. 2, P. 14) spring from the rim or close below it. There are no examples of the cabled and ribbed handles found on some sites, and their decoration is limited to the occasional use of incised lines (P. 17, P. 45), to stabbing the clay with a pin before firing (P. 12, P. 16), and to a rather frequent use of a deep groove at the base (P. 3, P. 8, P. 12). The body is usually undecorated except for rather sparse application of glaze, but there are two examples (P. 17, P. 18), both unfortunately only fragments, of white-painted designs. The bases are usually plain, but there are some examples of wide vessels (P. 1, P. 5, P. 6) showing a continuous line of finger-tips. The large vessel (P. 1) with provision for a tap at the base and a single bunch of applied finger-tip ornament on the shoulder should be noted. I have come across no parallel to the large-pointed base (P. 21), which seems to have belonged to a big store vessel like a Roman amphora in form, intended to be embedded in soft ground.

Of the cooking-pots on Fig. 4 little need be said except to note the persistence into the later Middle Ages of shapes and decoration usually associated with the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. They would normally have sagging bases like P. 34 on Fig. 5, of which there are several other examples in the collection. P. 46 may be sixteenth century in date.

Fig. 5 shows two types of lids, the larger handled type (P. 53) for big store jars and crocks such as P. 43, and the smaller type with a knob (P. 26). Both are perforated with jabs of a pin before firing. The curious incurved rim (P. 42), designed to prevent liquid contents of the vessel from spilling, should be noted.

It is impossible at present to say with certainty where this pottery was made. It is at any rate certain that it

did not come from the kilns recently excavated by Mr. Vidler at Rye.¹ The characteristic styles there prevalent, notably the incised ware, the red-painted ware, and the ware with applied decoration, are all unrepresented at Bodiam, while the general quality of the Bodiam pottery, and such tricks as the use of deep grooves at the base of otherwise plain handles, seem alien to the tradition of the Rye kilns. The latter had indeed probably ceased production before the foundation of Bodiam Castle.

It is more than probable that most of our pieces were made on the spot, as was normally the case in any large institution or community in the Middle Ages, and the suggestion is strengthened by the presence of at least one vessel which seems to be a waster (P. 8). But if this was so the site of the Bodiam kilns remains unknown. It may be noted in conclusion that a number of the better preserved pieces have recently been excellently restored at the London Museum. The descriptions of the individual pieces are as follows:

FIG. 1.

P. 1. Large handled pitcher in pink, sandy ware with finger-tip base. A patch of dark olive-green glaze on the shoulder covers a single bunch of applied finger-tip decoration. At the side just above the base is a projecting circular nozzle into which a tap could be fitted for drawing off the contents. The handle has a slight central rib and is applied to the outside of the vessel against and below the collared rim.

P. 2. Tall handled pitcher in buff-grey ware with plain base, and traces of sparse green glaze on the shoulder. The handle, oval in section with slight central groove towards the base, joins the neck well below the flat-topped rim.

P. 7. Small bulbous handled jug in coarse buff-grey ware with plain base and traces of light green glaze on the shoulder. The handle, oval to circular in section, springs from below the rim, which is swollen and grooved for a lid.

P. 12. Upper part of handled pitcher in hard red ware with grey surface. The handle, oval in section with deep groove at its base, has been jabbed with a pin all over before baking: it has a lateral finger-tip on each side at its junction with the neck immediately below the rim.

P. 13. Upper part of handled pitcher in hard red ware with grey

¹ *S.A.C.* LXXIV (1933), pp. 45-64.

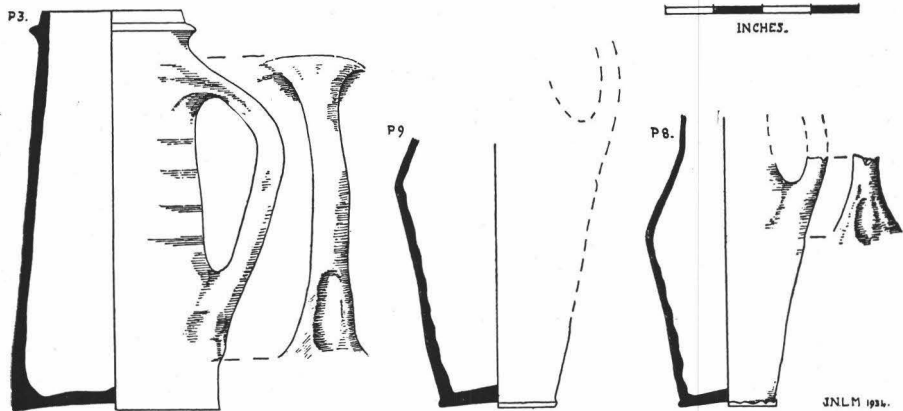


FIG. 3.

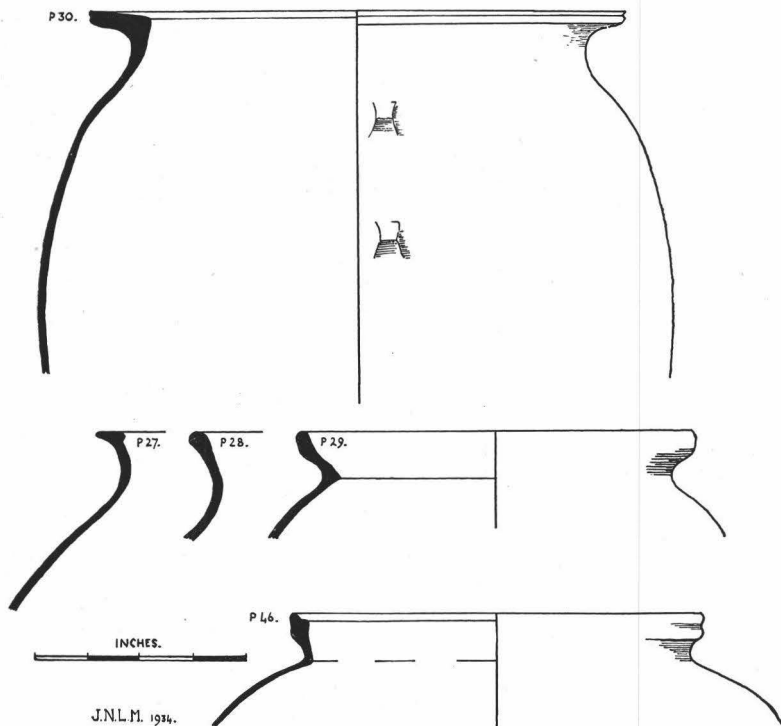


FIG. 4.

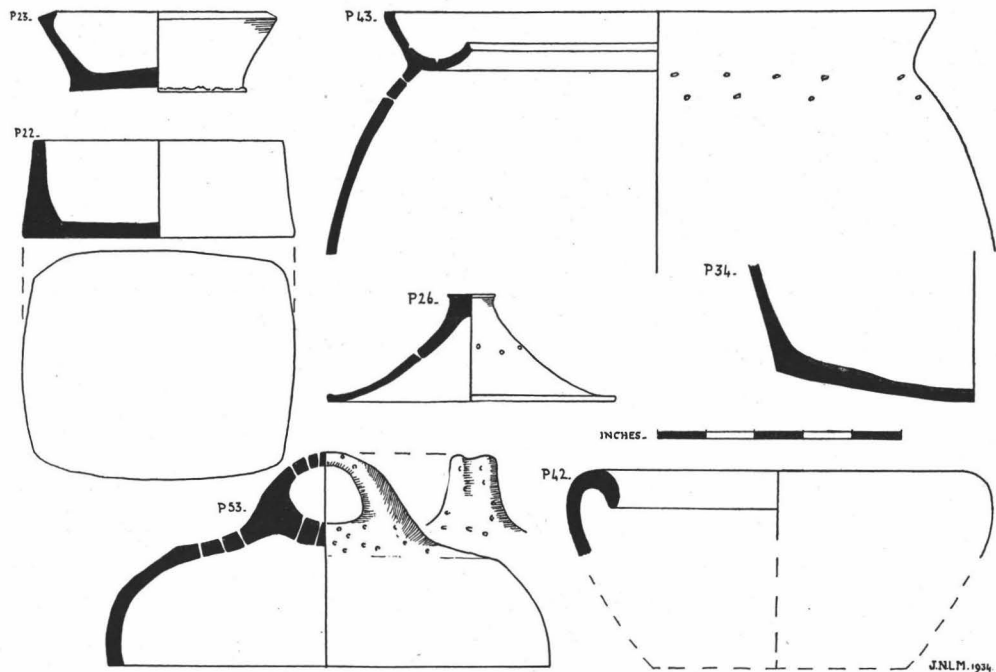


FIG. 5.

surface. The plain handle tending to rectangular section springs from the lower part of the rim.

P. 16. Upper part of handled pitcher in coarse pink ware with traces of purplish-green glaze. The handle is flat in section and springs from just below the rim: it has been perforated before baking by jabs with a pin.

P. 21. Pointed base of a large amphora-like vessel in coarse pink ware with light green glaze sprinkled inside and out. The surviving part is unsymmetrical, and the shape of the missing portion is doubtful.

FIG. 2.

P. 5. Wide-bellied handled pitcher of unglazed, smoke-grey ware with finger-tip base. The plain handle, flat oval in section, springs from the rim.

P. 6. Lower part of wide-bellied handled pitcher of unglazed, smoke-grey ware with finger-tip base and plain oval handle: similar in general character to P. 5, but more sagging in profile.

P. 14. Upper part of tall slim pitcher in buff ware with traces of olive-green glaze. The handle of circular section springs from below the flat-topped rim, which has a rising inner flange.

P. 15. Flat, grooved handle of large pitcher in pink ware with dull light-green glaze.

P. 17. Upper part of handled pitcher in pinkish ware with part of white-painted design on the body. The flat, grooved handle springs from below the rim and is decorated with two incised lines and some purplish glaze.

P. 18. Base of handle of pitcher in pink ware with grey surface and part of white-painted design on the body. The flat handle has three grooves on the base.

P. 35. Tripod handled skillet in bright pink ware with yellowish-orange glaze on the shoulder. The handle has been restored.

P. 45. Upper part of handle and rim of pitcher in grey ware. The flat handle is decorated with incised lines and jabs.

FIG. 3.

P. 3. Straight-sided handled jug in buff ware with traces of greenish-orange glaze and plain base. The handle springs from below the flanged rim and is oval in section with a deep groove at its base.

P. 8. Lower part of small handled vessel of carinated type in pink ware with shiny green spotted glaze on the shoulder, plain base, and handle with a groove in its base. The vessel has a flaw in firing on one side and is probably a 'waster'.

P. 9. Lower part of rather larger vessel similar to P. 8: buff ware, trace of olive-green glaze on the carination. These two vessels, P. 8 and P. 9, are not unlike those from Cheam, Surrey, now in the Guildford Museum.

FIG. 4. Cooking-pots.

P. 27. Flat-topped, everted rim and spreading shoulder of grey ware cooking-pot. The shard shows traces of a handle.

P. 28. Everted rim of coarse, sandy, buff ware cooking-pot.

P. 29. Sharply everted and cupped rim of smooth, buff-grey ware cooking-pot.

P. 30. Upper part of cooking-pot in grey sandy ware with flat-topped, everted rim and widely spaced, vertical bands of pinched-up decoration on the upper part of the body.

P. 46. Swollen and grooved rim of globular vessel in pink ware with strong orange glaze—probably Tudor.

FIG. 5.

P. 22. Roughly rectangular, straight-sided dish in heavy, coarse, pink ware.

P. 23. Small dish in buff ware with shiny greenish-yellow glaze inside, and traces outside.

P. 26. Small lid in fine pink ware with flat-topped knob handle. It has been punctured all round with a pin before baking.

P. 34. Sagging base of heavy buff cooking-pot with traces of yellow glaze inside.

P. 42. Inturned rim of vessel of buff ware with traces of yellow glaze. The suggested outline of the lower part is purely conjectural.

P. 43. Upper part of large cooking-pot or storage vessel in pink, sandy ware, the rim with strongly developed groove for lid: traces of dark glaze in the groove, and both the groove and side below it have been perforated by a pin before baking, most if not all of the perforations in the groove being incomplete.

P. 53. Large handled lid in pink ware with orange glaze. There are numerous perforations made with a pin before firing in the upper part and in the handle, which is flat in section and slightly grooved. This lid would fit a vessel of the type and size of P. 43, but the difference of ware and glaze show that it was not made for this example. The lid is slightly unsymmetrical.