

Early Post-Medieval pottery from no 137 High Street, Guildford

Introduction

In 1977 redevelopment of No 137 High Street, Guildford, disclosed a medieval rubbish pit beneath the rear part of the premises. The pottery which forms the subject of this note had been deposited in the upper part of the pit, probably early in the 16th century. It was recovered from a contractor's trench. Excavation of the pit by hand would have been impossible because it was centred below the party wall separating No 137 from the basement of No 135, which is a vault of the National Westminster Bank. The pottery is now in Guildford Museum. It appears to have been deposited over a comparatively short period, and has been thought to merit publication for two reasons. Firstly, it falls into a period which has been very poorly represented on other Guildford sites investigated so far, and secondly the assemblage is chiefly composed of several wares differing in both fabric and style from the Surrey Ware dominant in this area in both late medieval and later 16th–17th century groups of ordinary domestic pottery. These unfamiliar wares pose questions with regard to their source, and highlight the problem on which other writers have commented, namely what was happening to the Surrey Ware industry at about the turn of the 15th century.

The Pottery (figs 1, 2)

FABRICS

There are several distinct fabrics, as described below:

- A Sandy ware. Some of this (A1) can be distinguished from the rest (A2) by the colour and texture of its surface and the core colour, but in most cases it does not appear to differ significantly otherwise, and the close similarity of two jugs described below suggests a common source for much of this material. The A1 pottery has a blackish, dark or medium brown surface with a pimply texture, and red or pink fabric throughout. The A2 pottery is more variable, and probably several vessels have been included in this category which should have been put into a separate class. It has a pink, buff or grey core but is not consistently pink, and the surfaces are generally lighter than A1 in colour as well as slightly smoother. One pot only, no 5, has been classed simply as A unspecified because of a distinctive fabric and style.
- B Grey ware. This has comparatively smooth greyish-brown surfaces and is frequently very thin.
- C Flaky ware, with pink, buff or light brown smooth surfaces and pink, buff or grey core.
- D Smooth red ware comparable to a modern clay flowerpot (only one example, no 3).
- E Pink ware. This is slightly sandy, with a pink fairly smooth surface and red core. A few small flakes of mica visible on the surface also distinguish it from the other sandy fabrics.
- F Surrey Ware. F1 is a fine smooth-surfaced fabric free of visible tempering and light in colour. F2 has visible sand tempering, although not as coarse as the usual medieval Surrey Ware. The colour is buff, sometimes with a pinkish tone.
- G German stoneware, probably Raeren.

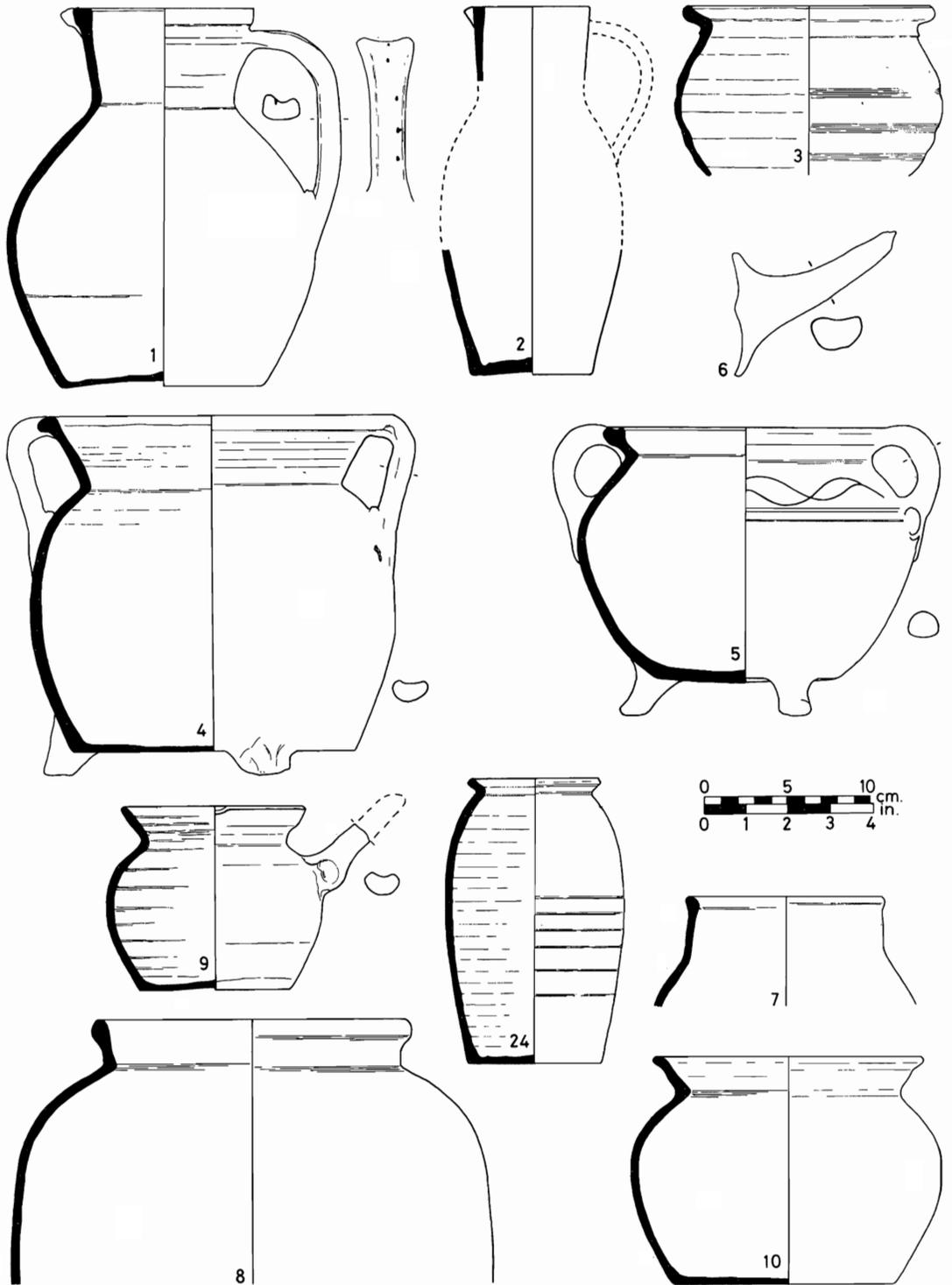


Fig 1. Early post-medieval pottery from No 137 High Street, Guildford: Jugs, nos 1-2; cooking pots: cauldron type, nos 4-5; other cooking pots and jars, nos 3, 6-10; butter pot, no 24. (3)

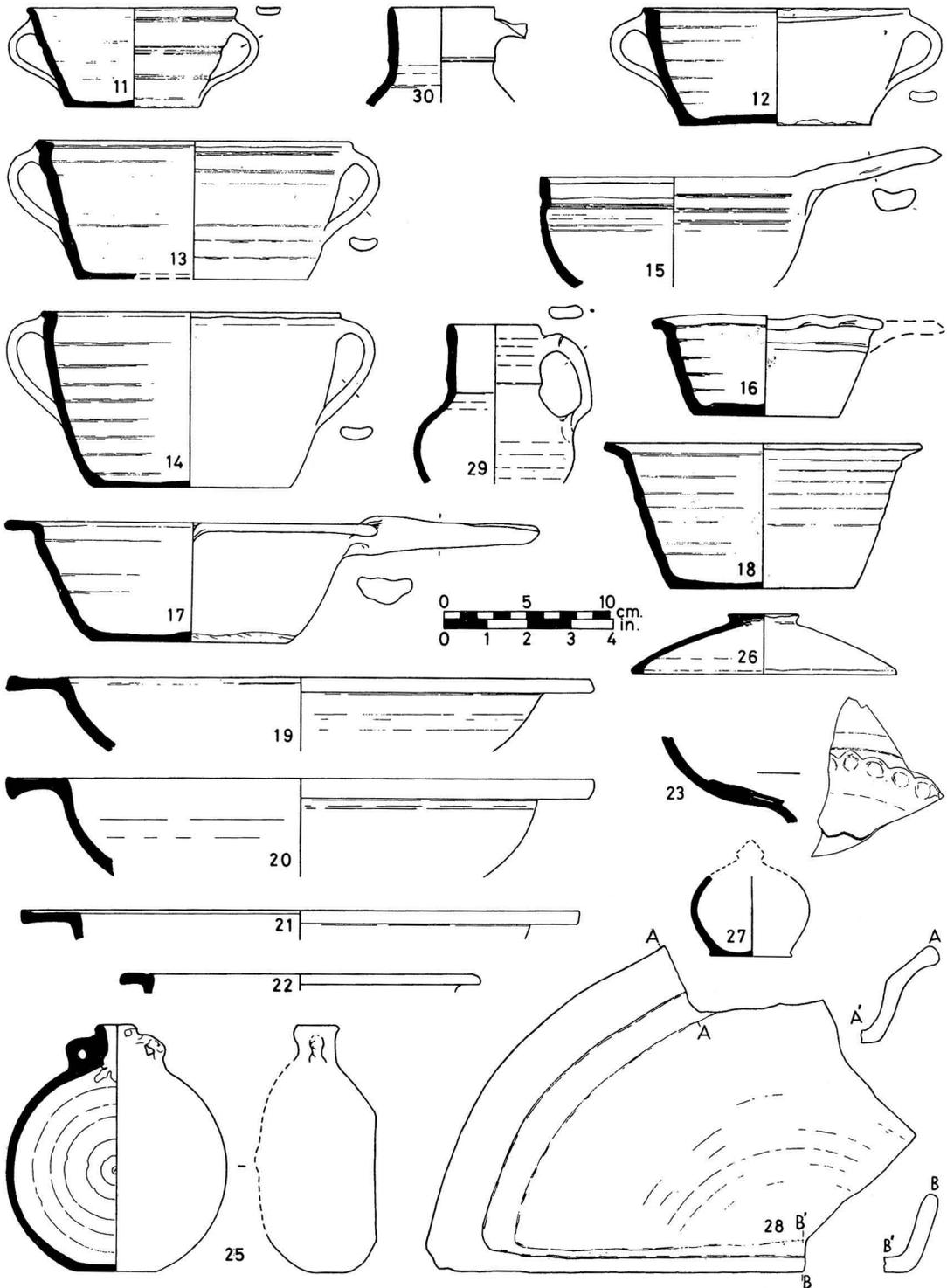


Fig 2. Early post-medieval pottery from No 137 High Street, Guildford: Bowls and skillets, nos 11-18, 22; dishes and platters, nos 19-21; chafing dish bowl, no 23; costrel, no 25; butter pot lid, no 26; money box, no 27; dripping pan, no 28; stoneware mugs, nos 29-30. (4)

Fabrics

	A	A1	A2	B	C	D	E	F1	F2	G	Total
Jugs		1	3					2			6
Cooking pots: cauldron type	1						1				2
Other cooking pots or jars		4	5	1		1					11
Bowls with vertical handles				2	4			1			7
Skillets								1	2		3
Bowls without handles			1					1	1		3
Flat-rimmed dishes or platters			2				1		2		5
Chafing dishes			1								1
Butter pots				1							1
Costrels								3			3
Lids				2							2
Money boxes								1			1
Dripping pans			1								1
Mugs										2	2
<i>Total</i>	1	5	13	6	4	1	2	9	5	2	48
<i>Percentage</i>	2	10	27	12	8	2	4	19	10	4	98

DISTRIBUTION OF FABRICS AND FORMS

The number of vessels shown above is the minimum number identifiable and is probably not far short of the actual number present. The 30 figured vessels include examples of all the forms listed. About 11 others could have been illustrated but were generally so similar that it did not seem necessary. The remaining material gave no indication of including any form distinctly different from those illustrated.

FORMS

Jugs

The jug illustrated as no 1 was in the dark-faced A1 fabric, but the close similarity of another in A2 fabric (not illustrated) suggests that both came from the same source. There was part of a larger jug with three horizontal inscribed lines on the shoulder, and of a second vessel which was probably also a large jug, both in A2 fabric. No other form of decoration and no glaze occurred on these jugs. Parts of a Surrey Ware (F1) jug with olive-green glaze are shown as no 2 and there was a sherd from another jug of this type with a thinner rim and speckled green glaze.

Cooking pots: cauldron type

The only two representatives of this type are illustrated as nos 4 and 5, both in different fabrics from the remaining cooking pots. No 4 was in the pink fabric E. No 5 was in a thin, hard grey-cored sandy fabric with orange-red slightly rough surfaces. This was sufficiently distinct from the other sandy pottery to be classed as fabric A unspecified. Both vessels were glazed internally in the lower part and no 5 also had splashes of glaze outside as well as curvilinear inscribed decoration on the shoulders.

Other cooking pots and jars

The only vessel found with a handle attached was no 9, in fabric B. The handle illustrated as no 6 obviously came from a larger vessel in A2 fabric but other parts of it did not appear to be present.

No 3 was unique in style as well as being the only example of fabric D. The same general form in a larger size is represented by no 10, in A1 fabric. This was one of four pots (two in A1 and two in A2 fabric) which had very similar rims of much the same diameter, but one at least was squatter in shape, and one deeper. No 8, in A1 fabric, may have been a still larger version of the same basic form. It seems likely that these were jars rather than cooking pots but none was sufficiently complete to show whether or not it had had a handle. The only example of a narrower-necked type of jar was no 7, in A2 fabric. None of the vessels described under this section was glazed.

Bowls and skillets

The commonest form in this group had two vertical handles. It appeared in three different fabrics. The smallest version (no 11) was in F1 Surrey Ware. No 12, in fabric B, is a composite drawing made from two virtually identical bowls. Nos 13 and 14 were in fabric C and there were two other similar vessels, all of which had split and flaked very badly. The smallest size of skillet, no 16, had a missing handle. This was in F1 fabric but the two larger ones, nos 15 and 17, were in F2. Bowls without handles were represented by no 18 (F1 fabric) and probably also by no 22 (A2). All the vessels described above were glazed internally except for no 12 and its duplicate, and no 15: there was some external glaze on nos. 11 and 16 as well. Part of the base of a bowl or skillet slightly larger than no 17 in F2 fabric has not been illustrated.

Dishes and platters

These appeared to be of fairly uniform type, as represented by nos 19–21, in F2, E, and A2 fabrics respectively. Another F2 rim like these is unillustrated together with an A2 broken rim thickened at the edge which was the only one glazed.

Miscellaneous

No 23 is part of the bowl of a chafing dish on which the edge of the tray has been ornamented by thumb-pressing. This and the dripping pan no 28 are two of the vessels which have been included in the A2 category, perhaps wrongly, since although sandy they look different from most of the rest. Both were glazed brown internally and had a brown external surface. The butter pot, no 24, was in fabric B together with the lid, no 26, which was one of two almost certainly belonging to the two bowls figured jointly as no 12. These were unglazed like the other examples of this fabric. The costrel, no 25, and the money box no 27 were both in F1 Surrey Ware and glazed green; there were however parts of two other similar costrels (unillustrated), one with yellow glaze and the other unglazed, or at least not on the part that survived.

German stoneware mugs

The two mugs were both in grey stoneware (fabric G) but the exterior of no 29 had patchy grey and brown glaze while the glaze on no 30 was a very shiny brown.

Discussion

There is no means of dating this group closely but it seems probable that it is distinctly earlier than 1550, which is about the time when the later 16th century Farnborough Hill kilns are thought to have begun production (Holling 1977). Their most common product was a pipkin with tripod feet and tubular handle, made in a range of sizes, which seems to have captured the local market completely. It is not known how early in the 16th century this form was introduced but it is impossible not to infer that such vessels were not available at the date of this pit group. The form of the costrel no 25 with its flattened back and slight flattening of the base is very close to the type produced at Kingston in the late 15th – early 16th century (Nelson 1981). This type of costrel had been succeeded in the post-1550 Farnborough Hill kilns by one similar to a round-bodied jug. Most of the sandy ware in the group has a coarseness of fabric more in keeping with medieval than with post-medieval pottery, and the sandy jars or cooking pots also seem to

be close descendants of late 15th century types, for example those produced in the Cheam red ware (Orton 1982). The similarity between the two stoneware mugs and some included in a group dated 1521 at Farnham Castle (Moorhouse 1971) may also be relevant. Taking these points together it seems not unreasonable to suppose that this group is more likely to date from the first rather than the second quarter of the 16th century.

A striking feature of the group is the relatively small percentage of Surrey Ware. In the Guildford area pottery assemblages dating from the later medieval period are almost exclusively Surrey Ware, and Orton has reported a similar situation in London:

'Thus by the mid-15th century almost all the non-imported pottery in London is Surrey White Ware, with Cheam supplying the smaller forms in a fine fabric, and Farnborough Hill the larger forms in a much coarser, sandy fabric (and a few special types, eg lobed cups, in a very fine fabric, but at this date these are very rare in London)' (Orton 1982).

However, he goes on to remark that the Cheam industry changed over completely to the production of red ware in about 1480, with the result that pitchers, cooking pots and bowls in this ware (though not necessarily from Cheam) very quickly replaced the Farnborough Hill types in the London area. It is notable that the Surrey Ware element in the group is completely deficient in cooking and storage vessels. Only the larger skillets would look out of place at the dining table, and the jugs too are for drinking and not for general household use. Reference has already been made to a group dated 1521 at Farnham Castle which offers some comparison. It contained 8 Surrey Ware vessels out of a total of 26 including stoneware, or 31%, with only one Surrey Ware example among three vessels identified as cooking pots, although there were two Surrey Ware jars. There is thus some indication that the loss of the London market for the coarser Farnborough Hill vessels was accompanied by a general retraction in this side of the industry, so that relatively few vessels in this class were being produced even for the local market, and that this situation lasted into the early 16th century.

It is perhaps relevant to look at the fairly extensive repertoire of very finely potted vessels made in the late medieval kiln at Farnborough Hill (Holling 1977). Unfortunately the remains of this kiln proved incapable of archaeomagnetic dating, but the inclusion of several forms which have been dated on other sites to the early 16th century suggests that it cannot be very much earlier than 1500: possibly, in the light of Orton's comments, it belongs to the latter end of the Farnborough Hill dominance in the 1470s. The cooking pots, pitchers and bowls produced in this kiln along with the finer products were not only in a very coarse sandy fabric, they were also typically large and medieval in character, with slashed handles on bifid-rimmed cooking pots and thumbled bases on bung-hole pitchers. If the suggested dating is anywhere near correct, one is led to wonder whether the Farnborough Hill potters concentrated so much on developing their finer products that they lagged behind in responding to the social and other changes which demanded smaller and more varied forms of kitchen pottery, leaving them ill prepared to meet later 15th century competition in this field. It certainly appears that forms in the Guildford group like the jars and cauldrons were foreshadowed in industries supplying London before 1480, but these forms do not seem to have been copied by the 15th century Farnborough Hill potters. Eventually the latter regained their local supremacy: at least from about 1550 they were producing a very comprehensive range of forms in addition to the ubiquitous pipkins, and it is typical that the Civil War group of pottery at Farnham Castle consisted solely of Surrey Ware (Moorhouse 1971).

At least five different sources are indicated by the non-Surrey wares, ie the red ware cooking pot or jar (no 3), the cauldron no 5, the pots in the grey fabric B, the flaky fabric C, and the variable sandy wares. None of these seems to have any immediately recognisable predecessor or successor in the Guildford area and their source is unknown. Samples of the various fabrics were examined by Orton but none was recognised by him as similar to pottery in London with the possible exception of no 3, which he found comparable to Cheam red ware. One must therefore hope that future discoveries will help to locate the sources of these wares, which seem to

disappear from the Guildford area in the later 16th century as mysteriously as they emerged.

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FELIX HOLLING