

Pottery from the Whitehall garden, Cheam, and its place in the medieval Cheam whiteware industry

CLIVE ORTON

FINDS PROCESSING AND INTEGRATION

By 2009 only a small proportion of the finds assemblage had been sorted, and the pottery from it washed and marked. It was estimated that between 400 and 500 bags (12 x 18in size) of finds remained unsorted. In view of the large amount of material, it was decided to concentrate on studying the pottery, and to note and store the other classes of finds for future work. A small working party was therefore set up to prepare the material for study. For the first session, a proportion of the material was moved to Honeywood Museum, Carshalton, where it was sorted and modern material discarded according to a policy defined for this excavation by Sutton Museum and Heritage Service. The following categories were counted, recorded and discarded: modern window glass, modern bottle glass, peg tile, pan tile, brick, stoneware drainpipe, modern concrete and cement, unworked flint, unworked chalk, coal, slate and plastic. The pottery was washed by hosing it in a large sieve, dried, but not marked as there was not time. Other classes of finds (eg bone, glass, clay tobacco pipe) were simply re-bagged, and everything was relabelled. For three subsequent sessions, it was decided to sort at the museum store (because so much material was being discarded), and then move just the pottery to Honeywood for washing and drying. All the washed pottery was then moved to Sutton Central Library. By the summer of 2010, apparently about half of the original site assemblage had been sorted. The rest was prepared in time for the summer 2011 phase of the project.

The second stage was to sort, classify and catalogue the pottery, according to a simplified version of the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) fabric, form and decoration codes (MOLA 2014) and to quantify it by sherd count, estimated vessel equivalent (EVE) and weight. Because of the emphasis on studying the Cheam whiteware, the 'modern' (post-c 1770) fabrics were put together as code MOD, and the post-medieval redwares were put together as code PMR. Post-medieval fabrics were quantified only by sherd count and weight. Within each context, each fabric was bagged separately, and the Cheam whiteware was further divided into its forms. The pottery was catalogued onto paper recording sheets and transcribed onto Excel spreadsheets.

This part of the work, called the *Time Cheam Project* (Orton 2014), was organised on an intensive basis spread over three weeks, one each in July 2010, July 2011 and June 2012. On average, twelve volunteers participated at any one time, divided into three teams of four people, with some variation to match individual availability. The first two years followed the same pattern: one day of training (Monday) followed by four days' cataloguing (Tuesday to Friday) and a small exhibition held on the Saturday. The training was undertaken in St Nicolas Church, Sutton, making use of its projection and audio systems, and the cataloguing was done in the Europa Gallery of the neighbouring Sutton Central Library, taking advantage of its excellent natural lighting. The public exhibition was also held in the Europa Gallery. The third week was rather different, as all the volunteers were continuing from year 2, and there was relatively little pottery left by this stage. The opportunity was therefore taken to examine and catalogue two museum boxes of kiln fragments, to study the site photographs (see above) and to compare and discuss the quantified summaries of each context-assemblage (see below).

A feature of this stage was that all the work was carried out in public while the Sutton Central Library was open, in the hope that this would encourage library visitors to visit the project, discuss the work, and become enthused about archaeology in general and Cheam and

the local societies in particular. The outcome in years 1 and 2 was disappointing; there seemed to be few visitors to the Library in general, and our publicity to local schools failed to elicit any response. In year 3 the work coincided with an art exhibition elsewhere in the Gallery, resulting in a slightly higher level of public interest.

INTEGRATION

As an aid to interpretation, a 'card' was prepared for each context, giving details of both the context itself (see above) and of its ceramic assemblage. The assemblage information is broken down into three categories:

- (a) total assemblage size, Cheam whiteware assemblage, and Cheam whiteware as a percentage of the total (all expressed as both sherd count and weight),
- (b) Cheam whiteware statistics: average sherd weight, brokenness (expressed in sherds/EVE) and a percentage breakdown by recognisable forms (expressed as percentages by EVEs),
- (c) Pottery of other periods, broken down into Roman, other medieval, early post-medieval and modern, in both absolute and percentage terms (expressed as sherd count and weight).

The cards formed the basis of a team game, in which the contexts were characterised in terms of various aspects of their assemblages, and these characterisations were compared to the descriptions of the contexts.

LIST OF ALL THE FEATURES AND CONTEXTS

Using the procedure set out above with the convention that context numbers are denoted by [], the following contexts were assigned to the well pit (group (a)):

Well pit fill: [46],

North of well: none,

East of well: [61], [62], [70], [71], [79], [81],

South of well: [59], [64], [76], [80],

West of well: [8] = F9, [41], [50], [51], [55], [56], [63], [66], [78], [82], [83], [87],

Uncertain locations: [84], [86], [89], [92], [108].

It was noted that [55] was below [51], and that [80] was below [76].

It appears from this that the well pit may not have been circular, extending perhaps mainly in an east--west direction. This supports the site plan (fig 2), which seems to show the well pit (dotted line) extending mainly to the east (right up to the extension to the house), less to the west, and little to the north or south.

Other features and layers

As described above, three other groups of contexts were recognised:

Group (b): fills of drain cuts:

Fill of drain trench 3: [38] = F12 = [9] + [25] + [34] (described as fill of pit, or dump)

Fill of drain 5: [49] = F2 = [6] + [22] + [52] (not described as drain fill, but link through F2)

Drain fill: [67] = F1 = [96] (not described as drain fill, but links through F1)

Drain fill [69] = F22

Black soil, part of drain trench [112].

Group (c): soil layers:

Black earth: [1+] = [1] + [13] + [15] + [18] + [23] + [28] + [30], [73], [93], [95], [98], [101], [104], [105], [109], [114], [115], [116], [120]

Black earth and Thanet Sand: [75]

Black earth and dump material: [87]

Black earth and pottery and building debris: [107]

Brown earth: [2+] = [2] + [16] + [20] + [24] + [29], [11], [102], [103], [106], [113], [117], [118], [119], [121]

Topsoil: [33].

Group (d): other features:

[5] = fill of F3

[7] + [17] = scraping, F5

[12] = F10 = black earth and flints and rubbish

[14] = F11, dump

[21] = F14 = [24] (but this is called same as [2])

[35] = F16, dump below concrete patch

[36] = F8, below [25], [35] and F12

[39] = F1 = chalk floor = [123]

[40] = F1? = sand below chalk floor/raft

[48] = F21 = fill

[58] = F20 = posthole, above chalk floor, [60] = F25, Thanet Sand

[85] = F35

[94] = F37 = black earth and chalk = [132?]

[127] = F46 + F47 + F48

[128] = F49 = [129] sand and clay/burnt patch, below chalk raft

[129] = F51

[130] = F57

[131] = F56

[133] = F53.

[31] said to be same as [17], but has different description

[32] below F12 and above cobbles

[88] various descriptions, above chalk pack, various horizontal relationships

[122] fill of depression below wall

[124] fill of posthole below chalk raft

[125] sandy earth below chalk raft.