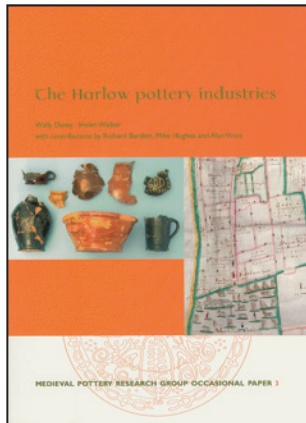


The Harlow pottery industries



Wally Davey and Helen Walker

Medieval Pottery Research
Group Occasional Paper 3

2009

198 pages
83 figures, bibliography, index

£16

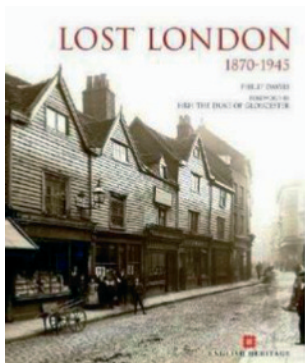
Reviewed by Clive Orton

Metropolitan slipware is well known in London as a ceramic indicator of the mid-17th century, and its name may suggest that it originated there. In fact, it was made in west Essex, mainly at sites around Harlow, but also nearer to London, e.g. at Loughton. This volume concentrates on the Harlow production sites, from their medieval antecedents to their demise in the early 18th century. Metropolitan slipware was not their only product – there were also black-glazed wares and plain redwares (but recognisably finer than the contemporary redwares from the Deptford/Woolwich area). There must be a good story to be told about the competition between Essex, Kent and Surrey/Hampshire to supply London, but this work wisely concentrates on one regional source, without neglecting the others.

The Harlow kilns had the misfortune to be discovered too soon (i.e. in the 1950s to 1970s, before the resources to deal with large amounts of pottery were available), and it has taken until now for the pieces of the jigsaw to be brought together and presented in a coherent way. Inevitably, some pieces have been lost *en route*, and one is left with a sense of what might have been. Nevertheless, this is a remarkably thorough job. One chapter explores the documentary and map evidence, suggesting once again (as at Farnborough Hill) the possibility of immigrant potters. The structural evidence (or lack of it) from eight sites is presented, giving the impression of a series of relatively small producers, all making the same general products but in slightly different ways. There are traditional form typologies of the various wares, and a more innovative typology of the decorative motifs found on the slipware itself. This will be a great boon to anyone who has to describe excavated examples, and who will no longer have to second-guess the potters' intentions.

A range of evidence – from potters' wills to scientific analyses – is brought to bear on questions of production techniques and organisation, and the wares are compared with their counterparts in the London region. All in all, this is a comprehensive account which will be of great use to London archaeologists working on 16th- and 17th-century ceramics, and we should be grateful to the MPRG for seeing it through to publication. It would have been good to see an analysis, beyond straightforward presentation, of the decorative typology – which motifs occur with which others, for example – but given the fragmentary nature of much of the material, this could have been difficult to achieve. The format is standard A4 double-column, but the paper is rather thin, and both the text and the illustrations show through from the reverse, making some pages difficult to read. But this will be an essential work of reference for anyone working on 17th-century pottery in the region.

Lost London: 1870-1945



Philip Davies

English Heritage

2009

368 pages
Over 500 black and white
photographs; select bibliography
and index

£29.99

Reviewed by Becky Wallower

Compelling images, a purposeful rationale and insightful narrative make this much more than a coffee table book. The photographs, many never published before, document not only buildings, trade, transport and life across a period of great transition, but also the developing conservation movement itself.

Most of the images result from efforts to record a vanishing cityscape by the London Survey Committee, the LCC and their inheritors, in the wake of public alarm at the 19th c. destruction, redevelopment and wanton 'refurbishment' of historic properties.

Using both a chronological and thematic treatment, Davies pinpoints the atmosphere of place, from teeming streets to urban villages, and from Thames to teashops. Although the squalid courts and alleys of Bankside, the East End and Westminster show hideous poverty, they seem oddly clean. The smells of the noxious slaughterhouse, tripe boiler and tallow chandlers in a court north of the Strand can only be imagined, and such scenes contrast starkly with the lost mansions of Mayfair, great institutions and entertainment palaces. The desolate post war heaps of rubble in the closing pages obliterate the earlier lively views of crowded lanes and a thriving book trade around St Paul's.

I hadn't appreciated that the demolition of the Foundling Hospital, the Adams brothers' riverside Adelphi, or Little Dorrit's lodgings at Marshalsea post-dated photography; nor that so many medieval buildings in Aldgate, Smithfield and Borough survived into the 20th century; nor that timber structures were far from rare. Curiosities abound here – a giant cockerel from a Fleet Street coffee house that found its way to Shoreditch, huge ships' figureheads adorning the Baltic Wharf shipbreaking yard.

This is a surprising, absorbing and genuinely useful chronicle. Highly recommended.