

TWELFTH AND THIRTEENTH CENTURY COVENTRY WARES,
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO A WASTER GROUP
FROM THE CANNON PARK ESTATE (LYCHGATE ROAD), COVENTRY

Mark Redknap
Passmore Edwards Museum, Stratford, London E15

Summary

Until the establishment of the Nuneaton pottery industry in the 13th century, Coventry relied largely on locally produced wares. This report summarizes 12th century Coventry Sandy and Glazed Wares, and describes a waster group of slightly later date from the Cannon Park Estate - the first to be published from the Coventry area. Other evidence for the local medieval ceramic industry is reviewed.

Introduction

It is over thirty years since publication of material from the Opera House site in Coventry (Chatwin 1955a) and Brandon Castle (Chatwin 1955b), sites which first drew attention to 12/13th century tripod pitchers of local manufacture. Apart from the material from the Town Wall excavations (Gooder, Woodfield and Chatwin 1966), little has been published about the medieval pottery industry in Coventry. Impending publication of the Much Park Street and Broadgate East excavations (Wright forthcoming; Rylatt forthcoming) should present important long-awaited sequences and typologies. The opportunity has been taken here to review present evidence for medieval pottery manufacture in Coventry, and publish one waster group from a site to the south of the town.

The basis for the study of Coventry Ware has been the material from the Broadgate East excavations by M. Rylatt for the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in 1974/5; full petrological descriptions by A. Woods of both Sandy and Glazed Wares will appear in the Broadgate report.

Coventry Sandy Ware (Fig. 2)

This is a hard, coarse sandy fabric with grey core (10YR 5/1), dark grey margins and brown/grey to light brown surface (10YR 7/4). Inclusions are sparse very coarse sub-angular reddish brown sandstone, sparse coarse sub-angular quartz and abundant medium (well-sorted) sub-angular white and clear quartz. It is equivalent to Broadgate East fabric A and Much Park Street fabric 3.

Forms are predominantly cooking pots, with occasional decoration restricted to parallel or wavy grooves, rouletting on the shoulder, applied strips or stabbing on the rim; there are also dishes and bowls.

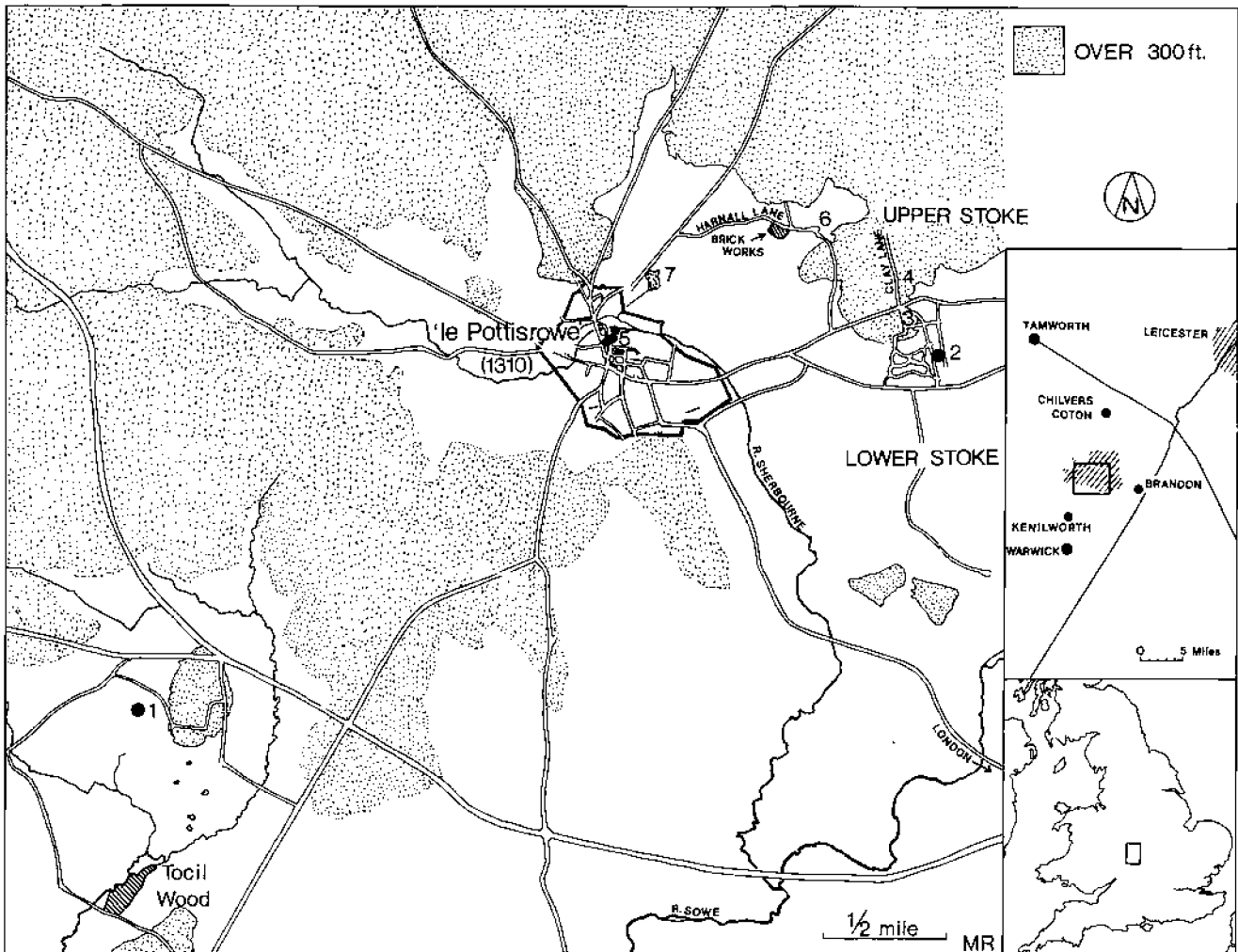


Fig.1 Site location, with Coventry's town wall and major roads (some modern) indicated.

Coventry Glazed Ware (Fig. 3)

This is a hard, coarse fabric with irregular fracture; it is generally dark grey (5Y 4/1) with patchy oxidized light brown margins. Inclusions are sparse angular reddish sandstone (0.2 - 0.5 mm, occasionally 1.0 mm), abundant medium-coarse sub-angular clear/white quartz. It is characterized by the thin, patchy external olive green glaze (5Y 5/4). It is equivalent to Broadgate East fabric D and Much Park Street fabric 4.

Forms are predominantly tripod pitchers, decorated on the body by combing in straight or wavy lines (occasionally along pinched applied strips), horizontal grooves, and applied strips in various patterns and combinations. The inlaid cable design on the handles is most frequent, followed by pinching, combing and stabbing. Pitchers were coil-built and wheel-finished. The bases were probably rolled out and formed on a hollow tournette, disc, or depression in the ground.

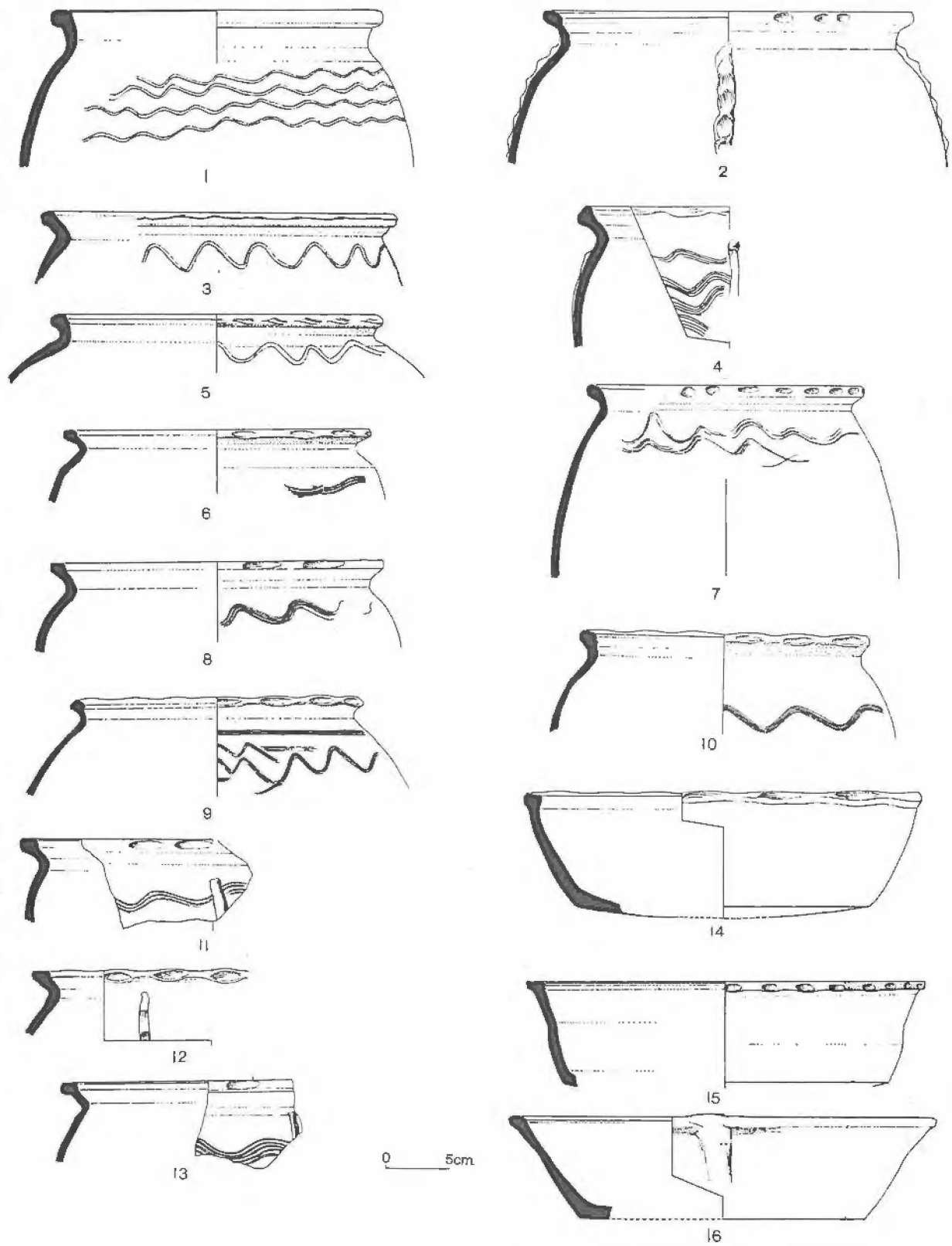


Fig.2 Selection of Coventry Sandy Ware forms from the Broadgate East 1974/5 excavations (scale 1/4).

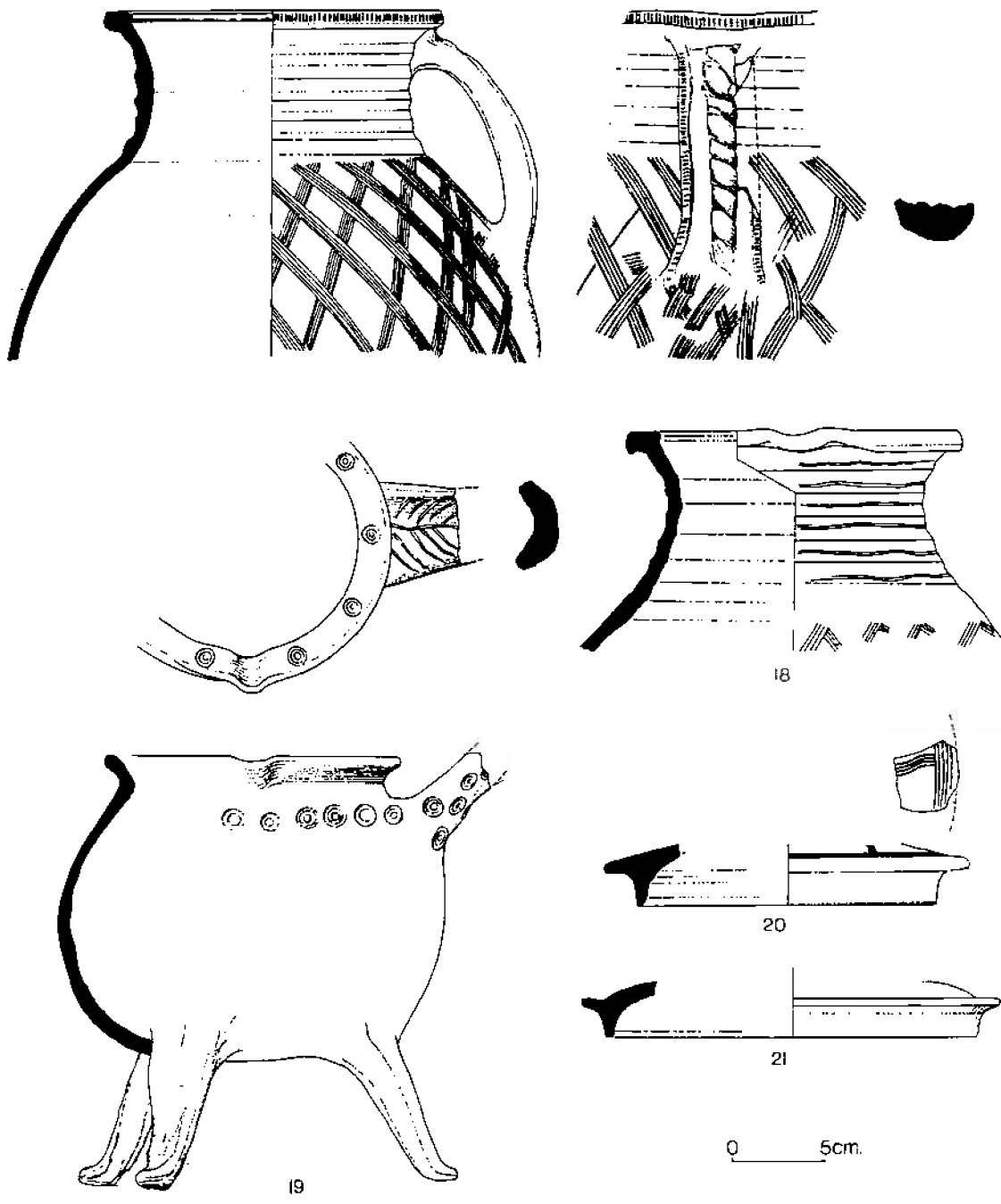


Fig. 3 Selection of Coventry Glazed Ware forms from the Broadgate East 1974/5 excavations (scale 1/4).

The necks may have been formed separately. Handle tops and tripod peg feet were inserted through holes in the body and smoothed flat internally. Other forms include tripod pipkins, dishes and lids.

Cooking pots and tubular-spouted tripod pitchers were also produced at Alcester (Cracknell and Jones forthcoming) during the 12/13th century, but no close dating is possible.

Date

The similarities of Coventry Sandy and Glazed Ware fabrics suggest that they formed part of the same industry. The sandy cooking pots appeared early in the Much Park Street sequence, and the forms are paralleled by mid 12th - mid 13th century material from numerous Midland sites (Redknap forthcoming). The tripod pitcher form was discussed in detail by Jope, and there are close typological similarities to the Oxfordshire pitchers dated c. 1140/70 - early 13th century which supplied the area to the south of Coventry (Jope and Threlfall 1959, 219 f.). Brandon Castle, which was constructed by the mid 12th century and destroyed in 1266, offers one of the closest sites to Coventry with Coventry Wares in a supposed sealed context (Chatwin 1955b).

Distribution

Few examples of Coventry Sandy or Glazed Ware have been identified outside the medieval town, where it appears on over twenty sites (Redknap in prep.). In addition to Brandon Castle, it has been identified north of Coventry at Tamworth (K. Scott pers. comm.), Chilvers Coton (K. Scott pers. comm.), and Kirkstall Abbey where over thirty coarse wares of West Midland origin have been identified and tentatively associated with visiting households of the Lacy family who held extensive property in the area (Moorhouse 1983, 66 and Fig. 10). Recently examples of Coventry Glazed Ware have been identified at Leicester and Nottingham in small quantities (M. Stokes pers. comm.), and several examples, including a dripping tray, have been excavated at Bridge End, Warwick (Ratkai 1985).

Cannon Park Ware

In July 1976, wasters were discovered by the resident engineer on the site of the new Sainsbury's Supermarket and Freezer Centre car park in the Cannon Park Estate to the south of Coventry. The area had been graded, and all archaeological features had been removed, but M. Rylatt and M. Stokes (Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry) recovered all the remaining potsherds, which are now stored at the Whitefriars Museum (Accession No. 76/108).

The site lies on the 300 ft contour on Upper Carboniferous clay (Fig. 1, 1), where areas bordering streams are prone to heavy waterlogging.

The fabric

For the purposes of this report, the variations of fabric are prefaced CP for Cannon Park. They form fabric E in the type-series for pottery from the Broadgate East 1974/5 excavations, Coventry (Redknap forthcoming), and fabric 7 in the Much Park Street fabric series (Wright forthcoming).

CP1 is a coarse hard reduced fabric, with reddish brown external margin (2.5YR 4/4+), black external surface (5Y 2.5/1) and grey inner surface (2.5Y N5/). It is very hard (overfired) with black outer glaze (5Y 2.5/1). Inclusions comprise abundant ill-sorted white and clear angular/sub-angular quartz (0.2 - 1.0 mm) and occasionally angular and rounded red sandstone (1.0 mm).

CP2 is a finer soft pink fabric (7.5YR 7/4) with yellowish-red outer glaze (5YR 4/6). Inclusions are abundant to moderate fine quartz (0.1 - 0.4 mm) with flecks of red iron ore/sandstone, and occasionally very fine black specks.

CP3 is a variation on CP1, with soft reddish yellow external margin (7.5YR 7/8) and dark grey core (7.5YR N4/), and external speckled olive-brown to dark grey-brown glaze (2.5YR 4/4 to 2.5YR 4/2). It is softer than CP1, with moderate very fine black and red specks, and soft red wisps.

CP1-3 are all minor variations of the same fabric, with glaze colour ranging from black, yellowish-red to olive and brownish-yellow. Briquettes of clay sampled from a site some 300 metres from the waster dump and fired to 1000°C in oxidizing conditions displayed similar colouring and inclusions (though the inclusions were sparser).

The forms

The most common wheel-turned form is the single-handled jug with sagging base (Fig. 4 22-34). The pulled handle was applied to the outside surface of the body and neck, and many show three external finger smears at top and bottom attachment points. Sometimes two shallow finger depressions are visible on the inside of the vessel wall at the points of attachment. One handle displays stabbing along its length in two rows (Fig. 5, 38). Some jugs have narrow necks (8-12 cm diameter), where fine external rilling may occur (e.g. Fig. 4, nos. 22, 23, 30). The pinched spout may have a finger print on either side. Bases may either be of plain sagging type, or pinched with long evenly-spaced finger depressions (Fig. 5, 42-45).

Parallels:

- Fig. 4, 25: similar from Coventry Opera House (Chatwin 1955a, fig. 1, 20)
- Fig. 4, 26: similar from Brandon Castle (Chatwin 1955b, fig. 8, 18)
- Fig. 4, 27: similar from Audlem (Webster and Dunning 1960, fig. 40, 9)
- Fig. 5, 37: similar from Kenilworth (Rahtz 1963/4, fig. 5, 18)

A waster fragment of dripping dish with blade-trimmed base closely resembles Coventry Glazed Ware (Fig. 5, 39). It can be paralleled at Kenilworth (Rahtz 1963/4, fig. 6, 25) and by a fish dish from Nuneaton site 9, feature 43 (Mayes and Scott 1984, fig. 102 no. 159). Other products are represented by a lamp or mortar with splashed green glaze and stabbed circular base (Fig. 6, 46). The base centre is quite thin, but its size is similar to that of cresset-lamps from other Coventry sites. Parallels include Audlem (Webster and Dunning 1960, fig. 42, 30-31) where it is described as a kiln prop, and Nuneaton (Mayes and Scott 1984, fig. 102, no. 158) described as a mortar. A fragment of ridge tile with external green glaze (Fig. 4, 47) appears to be either waster product or kiln furniture. One small stabbed fragment of fired clay of uncertain form may form part of a fire-bar or internal kiln support (Fig. 6, 53).

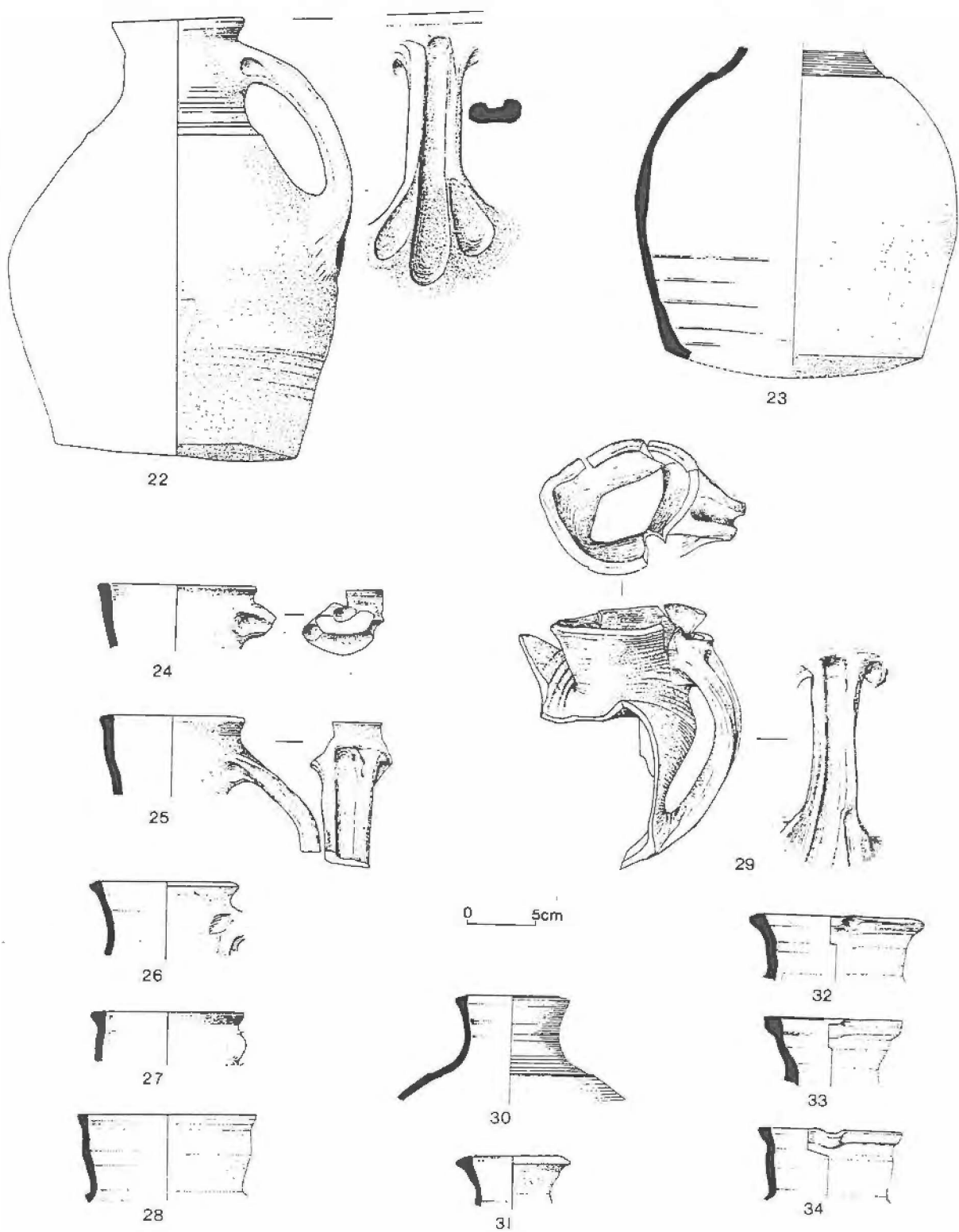


Fig.4 Jugs from the Cannon Park, Coventry waster group.

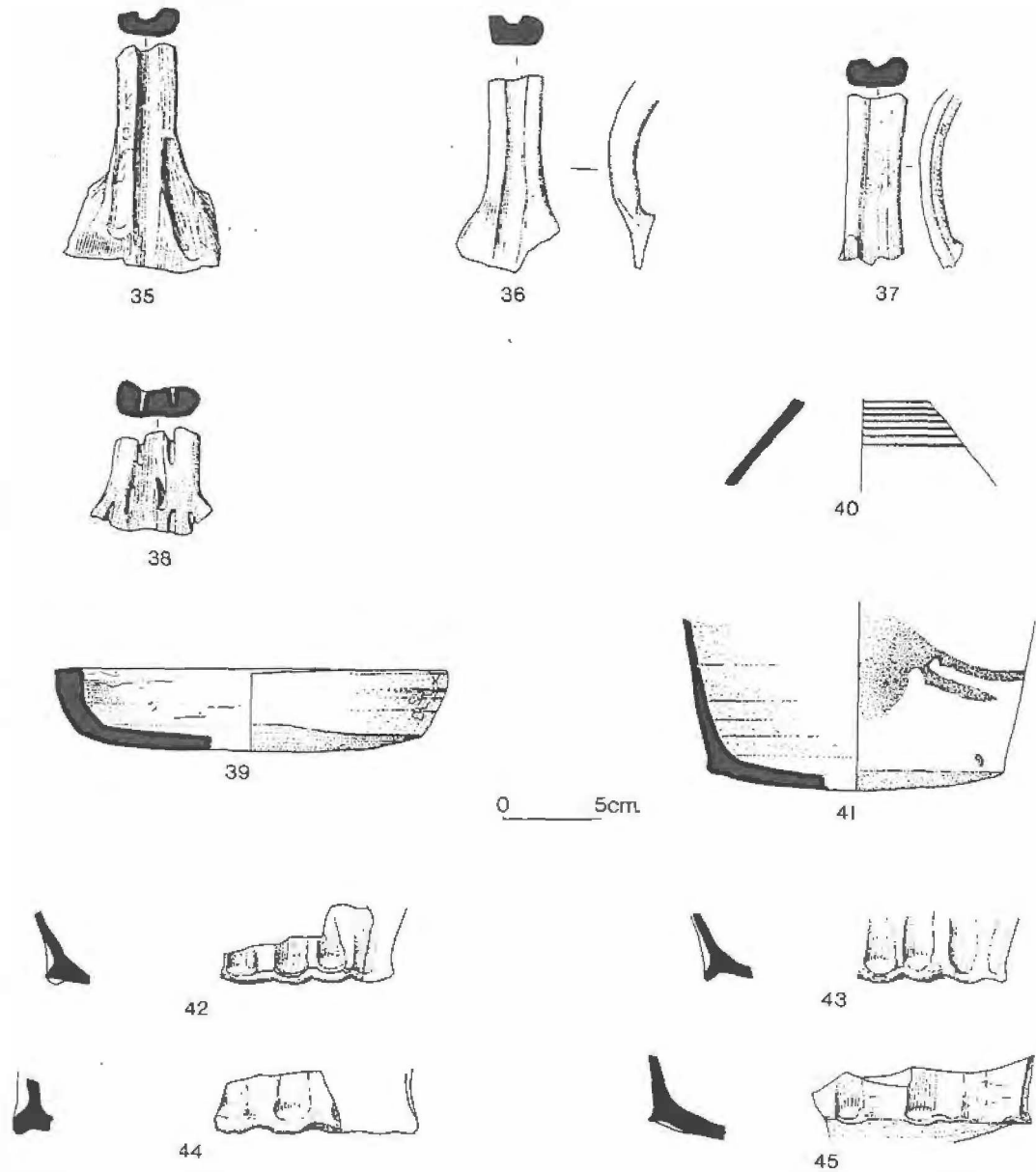


Fig.5 Selection of jug elements and dripping tray from Cannon Park, Coventry waster group (scale 1/4).

This waster material was associated with Coventry Sandy Ware cooking pots (Fig. 6, 48-52) and a decorated Nuneaton jug in sandy white 'Nuneaton A' fabric, with a worn green external glaze over brownish-green slip-trailed lines (Fig. 6, 54). This vessel is paralleled at Nuneaton site 13, kiln 32 (dated to c.1280: Mayes and Scott 1984, Fig. 49, no. 353).

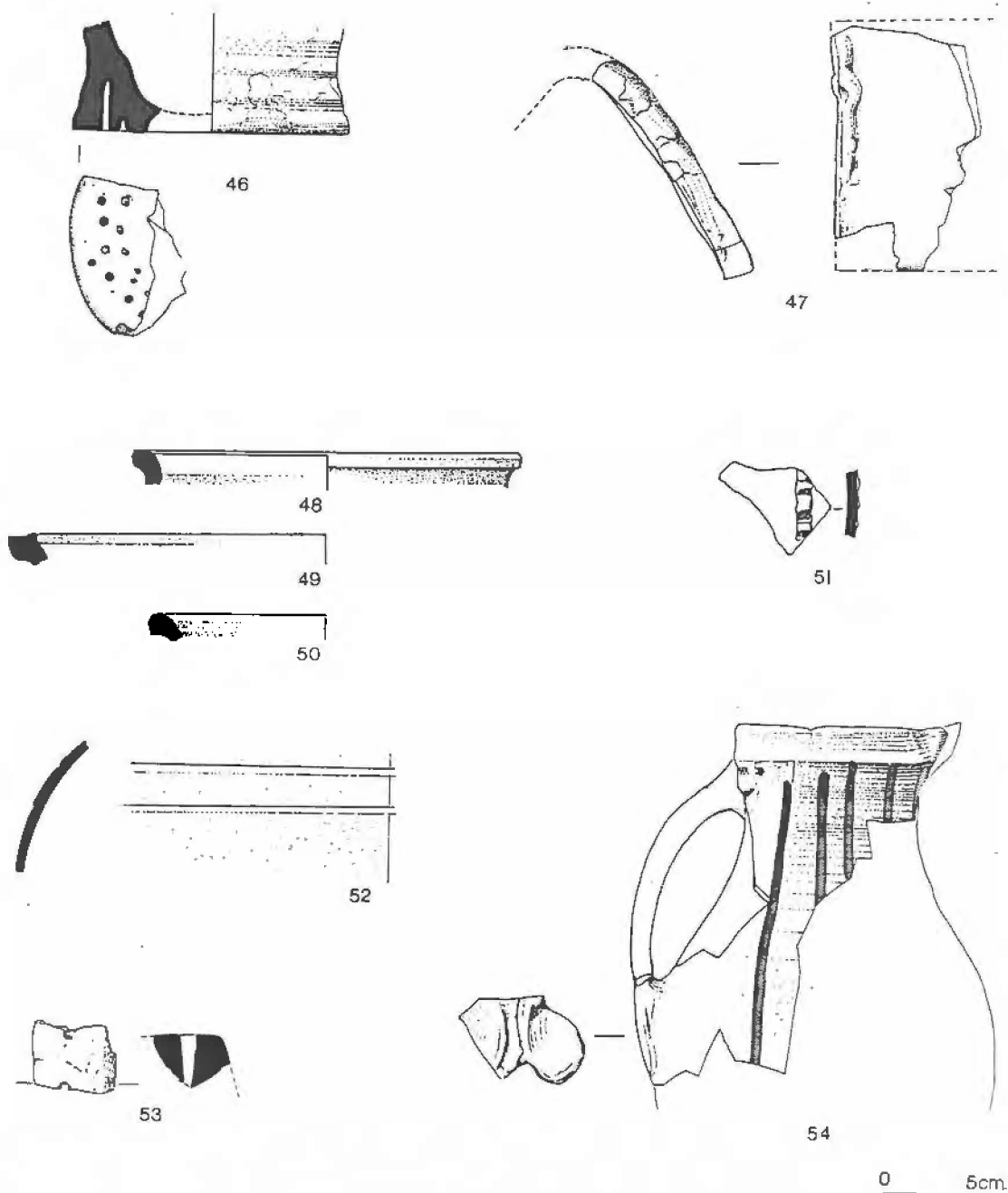


Fig.6 Kiln prop, roof tile and other wares associated with the Cannon Park, Coventry waster group. No.54 is Nuneaton Ware (scale 1/4).

Date

The material associated with the Cannon Park waster material has been dated elsewhere to the second half of the 13th century, and the Cannon Park forms correspond to the earliest Nuneaton Ware jug forms as found on Site 1, kiln 7 (end 13th century), Site 2, feature 6 (c.1340) and Site 2, kiln 10a (mid 14th century: Mayes and Scott 1984). The few examples of Cannon Park type from the Broadgate

East excavations are from phases 3a-c (probably late 13th-early 14th century), found with Nuneaton Wares. The lack of stratigraphic sequences or relationships between features, however, reduced the possibilities for dating to simple comparative presence/absence of pot types. Recent material from excavations on the Coventry Charterhouse (post-1385) includes a large group of late medieval redware bowls similar in fabric to the overfired Cannon Park fabric (I. Soden pers. comm.), whose final appearance was to some extent dependent on the firing conditions on the local red marls. The Nuneaton Ware jug associated with the waster material was fairly worn, and it may be appropriate to suggest a date in the second half of the 1250-1350 range. No features were identified at the site, and any associated with the material were probably removed during area grading.

No documentary references have yet been found to any potter working on this site, although about one km away in 1538 there was a 'Potters field' (MIN ACCT PRO Wards 8). The name survived until at least 1845 on the enclosure map for Stoneleigh as 'Pottersfield Coppice' (Fig. 1: Tocil Wood). Work in progress has recovered medieval pottery in the vicinity of Tocil Wood, and may identify further areas of production (being undertaken by Dr S. Hill, Dept. of Classics, University of Warwick).

Distribution

A few examples of a Cannon Park type fabric have been identified at Broadgate East, Much Park Street (Wright forthcoming) and Derby Lane (J. Perry pers. comm.).

Discussion

Coventry Sandy and Glazed Wares represent the early period of glazed production in Coventry, and Cannon Park Ware a short-lived attempt at later production contemporary with the early phase of the Nuneaton industry. At least three areas in and around Coventry have been associated with pottery production on archaeological grounds: (1) the town centre, (2) Stoke, to the east, and (3) Potter's Harnall, to the north.

1. Kiln structures recorded by the antiquarian J. B. Shelton (1936/7) in the area near the Benedictine Priory are likely to have been lime kilns. 'Potter Row' in AD 1410-11 (le Pottisrowe, AD 1310) began at the corner of Palmer Lane, and ran westwards and then north to the River Sherbourne (Mawer and Stenton 1936, 164; A. Gooder pers. comm.) in the vicinity of these 'kilns', whereas Ironmonger Row started at West Orchard and ran north along Cross Cheaping (Bradford 1750). In the absence of stronger evidence it would appear safer to suggest that potting within the town walls appears possible, but unproven.

2. The district of Coventry known as Stoke lies on Keuper sandstone, with Upper Carboniferous clay (Fig. 1). In 1911 a substantial, well-preserved tile

kiln was located during the construction of the Harefield Road Estate (Fig. 1, 3; Chatwin 1936) and it is for tile production that this area is best known. A newspaper cutting from 1917 shows two twin-flue kilns discovered in a sand-pit in Bray's Lane, identical in construction (of mainly roof tile) and design to the earlier example (Fig. 1, 2; Coventry Graphic 1917), and during excavations for an air-raid shelter in 1940, the remains of another tile kiln were uncovered some five feet (1.53 m) below ground surface a short distance to the east of Clay Lane (Fig. 1, 4). Stoke tile patterns are known at Kenilworth and Halesowen Abbeys, Nuneaton Priory, Bradgate House (Leicestershire) and Stoneleigh, and from recent excavations at Coventry Whitefriars and Charterhouse. The suggested start for production is the end of the 13th or early 14th century. No record exists of the complete range of decorative designs, and it is difficult to assign Warwickshire tiles specifically to Stoke manufacture.

Tile production is attested at Stoke from at least the late 14th to the 16th centuries, and the area would seem to offer a likely candidate for late medieval redware production in competition with Nuneaton. It has been suggested that the tiler of Nuneaton Group I tiles might have come from Stoke (possibly earlier 14th century: Eames 1984, 184-5).

Potter's Green in Stoke is referred to as early as 1280, and the Cheylesmore Court Records mention John Mariot, a tiler of Stoke, in 1364 and again in 1366. John de Coughton from Stoke was accused in 1368 of failing to have 8,000 tiles ready for collection (Chatwin 1936, 16), and the surname 'Tiler' was common here during the 14th century. An interesting reference to tile production at Stoke exists in the record of an inquest by coroner John Boteler in 1516:

John Ruyley, and a certain Alice, servant of William Ruyley, at Stoke, about the ninth hour of the said day, standing together in the hall [area] of the house of the said William Ruyley, near the door of a certain house of the said William Ruyley, called a tylehouse, where tiles are made, in which house a certain William Besworth, of Stoke, labourer, was making tiles; and he took in his hands a certain piece of clay from which he made a tile, and intended to throw that piece of clay at the said Alice, but missing the said Alice, it struck the said John Ruyley on his left side, from which blow the said John languished for two days and died.

(quoted in the Coventry Standard 24. 8. 1928)

3. Potter's Harnall lay outside the town wall to the north (Fig. 1, 7), and it has been suggested as one of the main suppliers of pottery to Coventry during the medieval period (Gooder 1984, 9). It certainly existed by the early 14th century, and is referred to in an unpublished Assize Roll in AD 1315 (Mawer and Stenton 1936, 166). The register of Coventry Priory (AD 1410-11: P.R.O. E164/21 f. 63) shows Potter's Harnall tenements in the area of Swanswell Pool (E. G. Gooder pers. comm.).

Shelton reported a belief that 'Roman kilns' lay beneath Jeffry Woods Cross of Harnall Lane, not far from the brick works (Shelton 1933), and material recovered in 1872 from a brick field in Harnall Lane, near the end of Freehold Street, during the extraction of clay for brick making includes warped voussoir

tiles that may have come from a kiln (Coventry and Warwickshire Press Cuttings 17.4.1914; label in Herbert Art Gallery and Museum), The Potter's Harnall area would therefore appear to be a likely source for Coventry Ware.

It is known that two Coventry potters belonged to the important Guild of the Holy Trinity in Coventry during the 15th century (Thomas Bouer in 1402, John Semely ?15th century: Gooder 1984, 15).

POSTSCRIPT

If you suspect that you have Coventry products and would like them identified, please contact Mr M. A. Stokes, Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Jordan Well, Coventry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am extremely grateful to the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry, for permission to publish this material, and in particular to M. Rylatt and M. Stokes of the Museum, to the Gooders and I. Soden for their comments, and to A. Woods (University of Leicester) for looking at the fabrics. Many thanks are also due to N. Alcock and the Gooders for documentary references to Tocil Wood and Potter's Harnall.

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