

## REVIEW

J. E. Pearce, A. G. Vince and M. A. Jenner, Medieval Pottery, London Type Ware, London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, Special Paper No. 6 (1985). 151 pp;92 figs., 20 pl., 8 coloured. Price not stated.

The DUA have so far published three reports on the general development of medieval pottery in London. The first and third of these to appear, dealing respectively with Mill Green ware from around Ingatestone in Essex and with Late Hertfordshire glazed ware, appeared in article form in the Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society. Further papers are projected. The present volume, which is concerned with London-type ware, has appeared as one of the series of special papers published by the same society.

It is altogether a more substantial work, well produced and abundantly illustrated with clear, well laid out drawings of complete and near-complete pots, predominantly jugs, from the reserve collections of the London Museum and the British Museum, to which it has been possible to relate the more fragmentary excavated pottery. There are even jugs illustrated in colour, as indeed there were for the Mill Green and Hertfordshire jugs, an innovation which, though doubtless expensive, has much to commend it as giving those unfamiliar with the material a much better idea of its nature than can be offered by the normal black and white.

The excavated material came from some dozen or so groups derived from recent work in the City, some of them stratigraphically related to one another. London-type ware proved to be the major fabric in use from the late 12th to the late 13th century and so merits the thorough investigation it has received. Within the term are subsumed a number of minor variations in fabric, all likely, given their basic similarity, to have originated in or near the City. A group of later London-type pottery has been left over for future publication.

The groups considered were dated by association with the timber revetments, themselves dated by dendrochronology, that marked the various advances of the river-front during the Middle Ages. A good deal of material was packed behind each new revetment as it was constructed, and these dumps included a fair amount of pottery, all very fragmented. There is little doubt that in general terms the material falls into a reasonable chronological sequence, but it is unwise, perhaps, to press the dating too narrowly, as the authors have been inclined to do. We know neither the circumstances nor the source of the backing material. Much urban rubbish was consigned to pits; more perhaps to convenient water ways. We are told that the sherds were small and seldom joined, which does not sound like pit material. Was it carted from the purlieus of some of London's great houses, in the fashion often described in connection with country manors - or was it dug from the river mud in front of the new timbering - or was it carted even from accumulations well beyond the City walls? Without answers to this sort of question it is best to be cautious about very precise dating. We are on safer ground with a massive accumulation like that from the City ditch at Ludgate, where sherds from the same pot occurred throughout the dump.

The distribution of London-type ware beyond the City suggested a water-borne trade, whether as the object of commercial enterprise or simply carried, as the authors suggest, by travellers, or the moving households of the period. Its distribution in northern Scotland, if it is not simply reflecting the presence of archaeologists, might indicate a stop on the way to Norway, where a good deal of English pottery has been found. It would be useful to know just how much pottery is indicated by the 'major' and 'minor' symbols of the otherwise clear and suggestive distribution maps.

The influences at work on the London potters from the time of the early tripod pitchers to that of the highly decorated jugs of the later 13th century is discussed in some detail. It is a great pity that we know so little of the background of these men and women. The most isolated village potter made copies of the products of other kilns, but there is nowhere else with anything like the wholesale imitations of north French pottery that this publication demonstrates for London. It is unfortunate that the otherwise useful diagrams that show so many relationships do not give an indication of the quantity of decorated to undecorated pot. Omitting the drinking pots, a shape totally plain in all parts of the country, something like three quarters of the jugs shown are decorated, a proportion that would be more than reversed elsewhere. To what extent, it may be asked, is this representative of the pottery of a capital city, to what extent the collecting habits of our national museums?

Jean Le Patourel