

This report presents the ceramic evidence from the Schild site in a lucid and organised way, and in the end is only let down by the excavation methodology and concentration on subjective rather than scientific fabric definitions. Unfortunately the pottery has been reproduced at 1/3, without catalogue descriptions or details of provenance. These quibbles should not detract from the value of the report as an important synthetic statement on the medieval ceramics from Schleswig. The book will form a valuable introduction to students of north German ceramics, and I for one look forward to the next report.

Mark Redknap

#### REVIEW

Catherine M. Brooks, Medieval and Later Pottery from Aldwark and other Sites, The Archaeology of York, volume 16/3, 1987, (pp 115-232). Price £8.75

Despite its prominent position in the public conception of British archaeology, the city of York has to date a disappointingly poor record in the field of medieval pottery studies. This, the third contribution to volume 16 of York's peculiar fascicule series, is the most detailed account of the city's medieval pottery yet to appear in print; it contains an extensive account of the medieval ceramics from YAT's site at 1-5 Aldwark (excavated 1976-77) and the editors have used to opportunity to include brief accounts of the pottery from some nearby (and some not so nearby) sites.

It is most unfortunate, therefore, that the material which was the subject of the study is not of the first rank. As Brooks herself puts it (p.234), the two main problems were the 'lack of dating evidence, apart from one radiocarbon-dated feature from the 11th century, and the large quantities of residual pottery in each phase'. One might add a third problem, for the archaeology of the site consisted of a series of ill-devised structures whose boundaries only just intruded into the area excavated, with spreads of garden-type deposits to the rear, the whole overlying extensive Roman occupation deposits. Brooks is well aware of the degree of disturbance which is caused by such a combination, and the intimidating amount of residual material on this site has obviously led to much heart-searching; her solution has been to include two sets of tables and figures throughout - one quantifying the material as found and the other showing what the picture would have looked like if the pots had behaved themselves and stayed in context.

Brooks is, therefore, to be commended for her rescuing of some valid statistical patterns from the material, but more serious than the problem of residuality is the first of her problems - the lack of dating evidence. No coins, no archaeomagnetism, no dendro, no documentary evidence and, judging by the lack of references, no datable small finds. One can but sympathise, for all that is left is the stratigraphy of the site and the ever-increasing circular arguments from external parallels.

Some might question the method of quantification employed, for it is rare to find a pottery report nowadays which is based on a sherd count - although Orton has told us that this method is as (in)accurate as any other. Others might draw attention to the lack of consideration of

Moorhousian features - left-handed sooting marks and so on - but these are yet to prove their value in practical terms. This reviewer's main criticism, however, concerns the method of presentation, which is by and large dictated by YAT's system of fascicule publication.

The great advantage of publishing in fascicule is that the specialist can be catered for. This Aldwark site has generated (or is planned to generate) five different volumes - volume 3/3 on the Roman archaeology, volume 10/2 on the post-Roman archaeology, the report under review, one dealing with Roman pottery in volume 16 (The Pottery), and an account of the site's small finds in volume 17. Since most medieval pottery specialists are not over-eager to spend their own cash on reports which have large sections discussing Roman features, the fascicule system has its supporters. Its detractors complain that it encourages the study of material out of its context, and Brooks has covered this by including a decent discussion of the stratigraphy of the site and a number of phase plans.

A pottery report is a double-headed beast. It is written partly for other pot reseachers and partly for the person who is compiling the site report. We are expected to supply information to the excavator to assist his or her interpretation of the site: this may take the form of vague suggestions on site status or usage, or perhaps patterns of soil-movement adduced from the distribution of joining sherds, but fundamentally we are employed to produce dates. All this information is fed to the excavator for incorporation into the report, the one which synthesises all the various strands of specialist knowledge into one coherent whole. Under the York fascicule system, it is presumably the 'excavation report' where this final produce appears - at least there doesn't appear to be any other volume of the YAT series where it can fit.

Having thus hived off all such site-specific information to be published where it belongs, the pottery specialist is left with the pots themselves, and an audience of other pot reseachers who want to know what new information has emerged to help them in their work - what date range can now be given to York White? what new forms of Brandsby Ware have turned up? how is the distribution of Staxton Ware affected? The fascicule system gives a wonderful opportunity for pot reseachers to speak directly to other pot reseachers, and it is in this area that the Aldwark report falls short. Perhaps the current reviewer is unusual in this respect, but he personally longs to see a page of Brandsby jug rims all neatly arrayed together, and groups of 'Gritty' cooking-pot rims all lined up in a row - in short what we all need from sites such as these is an illustrated type-series. My inclination is to photocopy (within legal limits) all the illustrations and remount the lot in a comprehensible format. Any spectacular pit- or well-groups can be left together, with duplicate illustrations appearing in the type-series; all else that is needed is a decent set of tables to enable the stratigraphic position of each vessel to be determined. Not until such an approach becomes standard will we all really understand what's going on on each others' sites.

Brooks struggled (wo)manfully with the material presented to her; her conscientious and thoughtful approach is apparent throughout the text. It is not her fault that the material itself was inadequate and that the method of publication employed was inappropriate.

Gareth Watkins