

R. Shoesmith, *Excavations at Chepstow 1973-1974*. Cambrian Archaeological Monographs No. 4, 1991. 174 pp, 15 plates, 81 figures. ISBN 0 947846 02 6.

Chepstow lies on the Wye at the point where it was crossed by an important route between Gloucester/the West Midlands and South Wales, and met another route following the Wye valley to Monmouth and the north. The town is famous as the location of the first recorded stone castle in Britain, built by William Fitz Osbern (1067–71). This monograph reports on the results of excavations undertaken in advance of the construction of a new road through the medieval town as the first stage of an inner relief road scheme. The report was actually completed in 1983 and publication was held up by financial problems. The sites investigated included areas close to the medieval wall, a street frontage site, and parts of the conventual buildings associated with Chepstow Priory, started as a dependent cell of the Abbey of Cormeilles in Normandy, which uncovered a large buttressed barn, parts of the monastic living accommodation and the remains of a 13th-century house.

The report is divided into four sections. The first two cover general background (topography, historical outline, previous archaeological work) and the excavations. The conclusions form the fourth section, and it is the third part on the finds which will be of particular interest to readers of this journal. The reports on floor and roof tile, and medieval pottery are by Alan Vince, whose aims were to establish the sources for the various wares and routes used to distribute them, and to examine the origin and growth of the local pottery industry. Large stratified medieval groups were present only on the three main sites, the Priory having the best sequence. Post-medieval pottery was poorly represented by only one stratified post-Dissolution group, and is only briefly mentioned. The author acknowledges that larger collections of stratified pottery are needed, and points out that the sequence would be improved by a study of the post-medieval pottery in Chepstow.

The medieval pottery was classified by fabric (visually and by thin-section). A coding system for fabrics was used, based on the order in which the fabrics were first defined, and arranged into four main groups based on the areas from which the pottery came. Group 1 comprises local wares; Group 2 comprises Bristol wares; Group 3 comprises other English imports; Group 4 comprises continental imports. Each fabric is described to a standard format, with additional sections on vessel types represented, and date range and frequency. These descriptions are thorough and form the core of the report, which is followed by a discussion of the sequences on the main sites, including tables of frequency (based on sherd count). A discussion of changing vessel capacities and technology leads to one on the evolving patterns of pottery use, interpreted in terms of the origins and development of the industry in the area, and its trade links. The grouping of fabrics by general area of origin means that one passes chronologically from early to later medieval within each Group. The late 11th/early 12th century is represented by one important assemblage from Site 11 (the Priory), containing handmade cooking pot fabrics from Bristol and occasional non-local wares from the Bath and Gloucestershire area, similar in composition to the Bristol Castle sequence. The imported wares of Group 4 are thought to have been shipped direct from Spain and France to Chepstow, which had its own trade with these regions independent of Bristol. Ham Green is the main source in the 13th-century, with wares coming from the locality, Vale of Glamorgan, the Somerset/Wiltshire border, Gloucester, Malvern Chase and Worcester. The late 13th century/early 15th century is characterised by local wares and those from Vale of Glamorgan, Bristol, Malvern Chase and Oxford/Brill.

A few minor omissions occur within the core of the report. For example, there is only a summary description of the forms for fabric Ha.3 (possibly Forest of Dean). The lack of acronyms requires frequent consultation of the initial code concordance, although some (not all) fabric titles are followed by a brief description of source. Illustrations of vessels are incompletely cross-referenced in appropriate sections of the text (such as within a discussion of typology), reference being needed to tables accompanying each figure (it is sometimes unclear which site is involved: such as pages 126–7). The captions list fabrics appearing on each figure, but the use of fabric codes accompanying individual drawings would have made reference easier. The fact that some fabrics have no illustrated examples is not discovered until the end of the fabric entry is reached, after a certain amount of page flicking. None of the stamps occurring on vessels are reproduced at 1:1. Proof-reading could have been better (*e.g.* medieval p. 103).

The delays to the publishing of this report have meant inevitably that some sections may need reassessment in the light of more recent research. M. Ponsford's work on the dating of Ham Green wares, based on the dendrochronological dates from Dundas Wharf, Bristol, has confirmed the establishment of Ham Green 'A' ware by the 1140's, and suggested a date for the Ham Green 'B' wares of *post c.* 1180 (perhaps *c.* 1200). The earliest Ham Green glazed wares reported at Chepstow occur in period 3a on the Priory site (first half of the 13th century), though the red-firing cooking pots are as common as the jugs in periods 2 and 3a on site 11. The reviewer finds the use of the term 'Ham Green A and B' for either fabrics or for styles of jug at times confusing.

This report has provided a much needed foundation on which future, more comprehensive study of the wares and trading patterns of the Chepstow area can be based, and further comparisons made with other towns in the region. It is essential reading for anyone studying pottery around the Severn and in the Welsh Marches, and all contributors are to be thanked for providing new data relevant to Wales, the Marches and the South-West England/West Midlands.

Mark Redknapp

J. E. Pearce, *Border Wares. Post-Medieval Pottery in London, 1500–1700 Volume 1*. Museum of London and HMSO 1992. 137 pp, 66 figures and plates. ISBN 0 11 290494 7. Price £30.

What is Border ware? According to Pearce it is a term used to 'denote the various products of the extensive pottery industry which flourished in the border area of north-east Hampshire and west Surrey during the 16th and 17th centuries'. On receipt of this excellent publication I wondered how many other people knew that. In fact I wondered so much that I asked. I spoke to medieval ceramicists and field archaeologists working outside the London area, and they all said the same thing. Even after being told that this was a London publication, they all thought Border ware was probably pottery produced in the Welsh Marches or the Scottish Borders. With some prompting, one person conceded that another possible border, and one relevant to London might be that between Kent and Essex. Before this book is opened, therefore, there is some confusion, which could have easily been redressed with the addition of a sub-title. Perhaps the obscurity of the title reflects a perception among the producers of this work that the likely readership is limited to those with local knowledge and interests. If this is so, then Pearce's efforts have been undervalued, because this is an extremely well thought out and well-presented volume which deserves a wider audience.