

# The Late Medieval Pottery Industry on the North Suffolk Border

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## SUMMARY

*Recent excavations at West Street, Rickingham Inferior, revealed a Late Medieval pottery kiln and associated products. This discovery has enabled limited comparative work to be carried out on the previously discovered kilns of similar date in the neighbouring parishes of Hopton, Wattisfield and Hinderclay. Descriptions of fabric types from other Waveney Valley kiln groups are presented, and the form types are discussed in relation to the Late Medieval and Transitional (LMT) pottery tradition in East Anglia.*

## INTRODUCTION

The area around Rickingham and Wattisfield on the Norfolk-Suffolk border (Fig. 1) is known to have produced pottery from the Iron Age onwards (Maynard *et al.* 1935; Wachter 1959). The drift geology of the area consists of Boulder Clay and mixed deposits of sand and gravel which contain large amounts of red- or grey-firing clay (Biek 1959). Roman and medieval tile and brick kilns are also known in the vicinity. Clay extraction seems to have been centred on the area known as Calke Wood, where pits of Roman and later date have been excavated (Wachter 1959, 7).

Previous work, notably by Basil Brown in the 1950s, has revealed a large number of Roman kiln sites (Maynard 1951, 215). Late Medieval and Transitional (LMT) kilns are less numerous, but quantities of wasters and kiln material have been found at a number of sites during fieldwalking.

The LMT tradition of pottery manufacture in East Anglia was first identified in Norwich (Jennings 1981) and dated to the mid 15th to late 16th centuries. The Waveney Valley and Wattisfield areas were major pottery centres at this period. Two distinct areas of pottery production have been identified in and around the Waveney Valley on the Norfolk-Suffolk border. For the purposes of this paper 'Waveney Valley' refers to the group of pottery-producing parishes in the north-east of the valley and 'Wattisfield area' refers to Wattisfield, Rickingham, Hopton and Hinderclay. It is likely that some of the products of these two areas supplied the Norwich market, since some of the vessels excavated in the city are very similar to those found at

Rickingham (e.g. *ibid.*, fig. 24, no. 403; fig. 26, no. 441; fig. 27, nos. 457, 464, 465; fig. 28, nos. 489, 490), although the fabric is slightly different. The larger towns in the local area were probably the major outlet for products from the Wattisfield area. Material from these kilns has not yet been identified in the major regional trade centres, but this is probably due to the limited work which has been carried out on the group in the past. Products from the Waveney Valley have recently been identified in Dunwich (M. Hardy, pers. comm.) and possibly Ipswich.

The main focus of this report is the newly-discovered kiln at West Street, Rickingham (TM0273; site RKN 030). However, previous excavations have revealed LMT kiln sites at Hopton, Wattisfield and Hinderclay, and intensive work in the north-east section of the Waveney Valley by M. Hardy (e.g. Martin *et al.* 1985) has also produced large quantities of kiln waste. All of these sites are still awaiting publication, and for this reason fabric descriptions of material from each kiln group are included here. The basic form types are similar across the whole area, and illustrations have been published elsewhere (Jennings 1981).

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

by A. M. Breen

A search for documentary evidence was impeded by a lack of early cartographical material. The tithe apportionment (SRO 1842: a document held by the Suffolk Record Office; for details of this and the following, see bibliography) is one of a minority of

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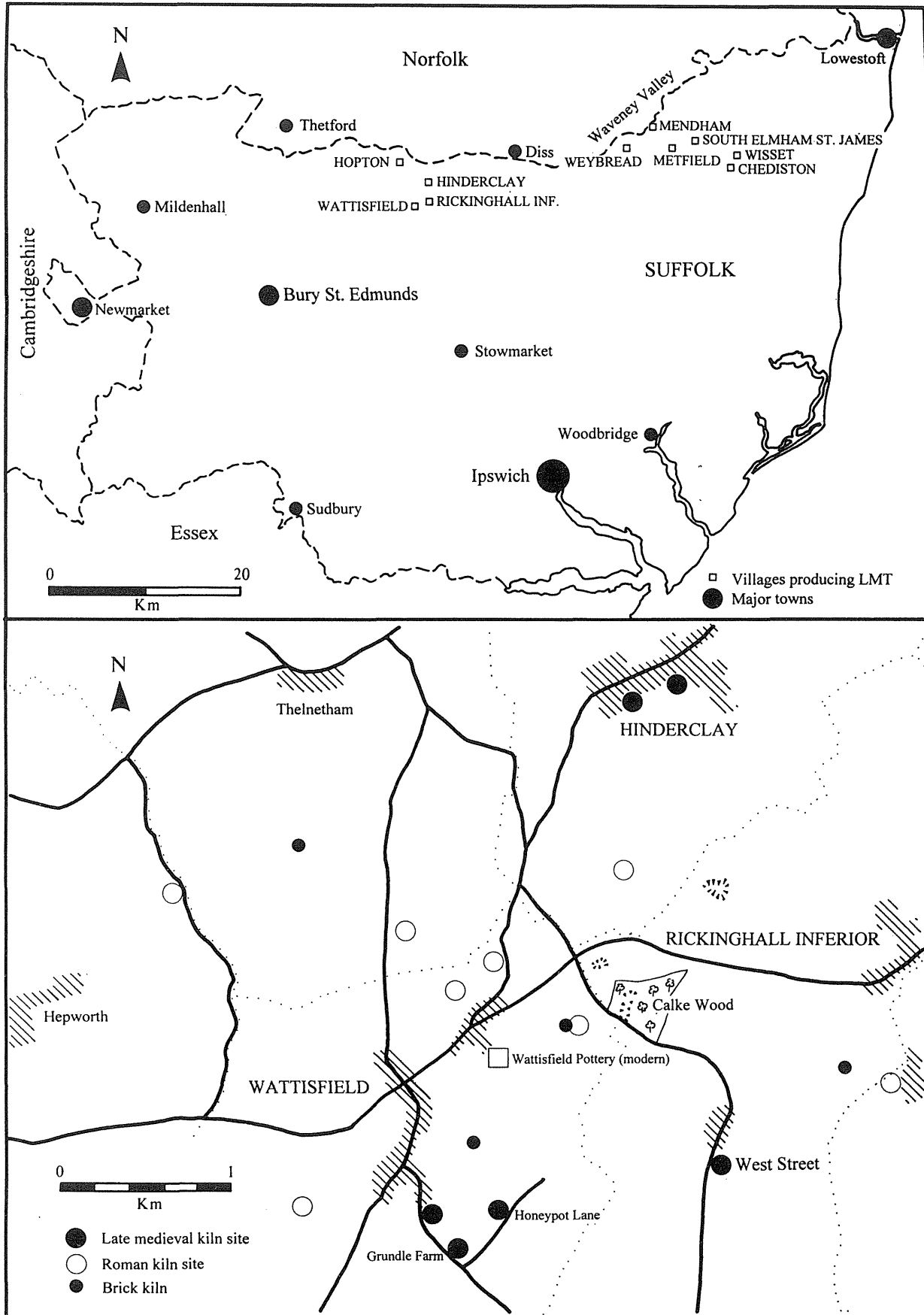


Fig. 1. Location map: top, known LMT production areas; bottom, Wattisfield and Rickinghall areas, showing Roman, LMT and brick kiln sites.

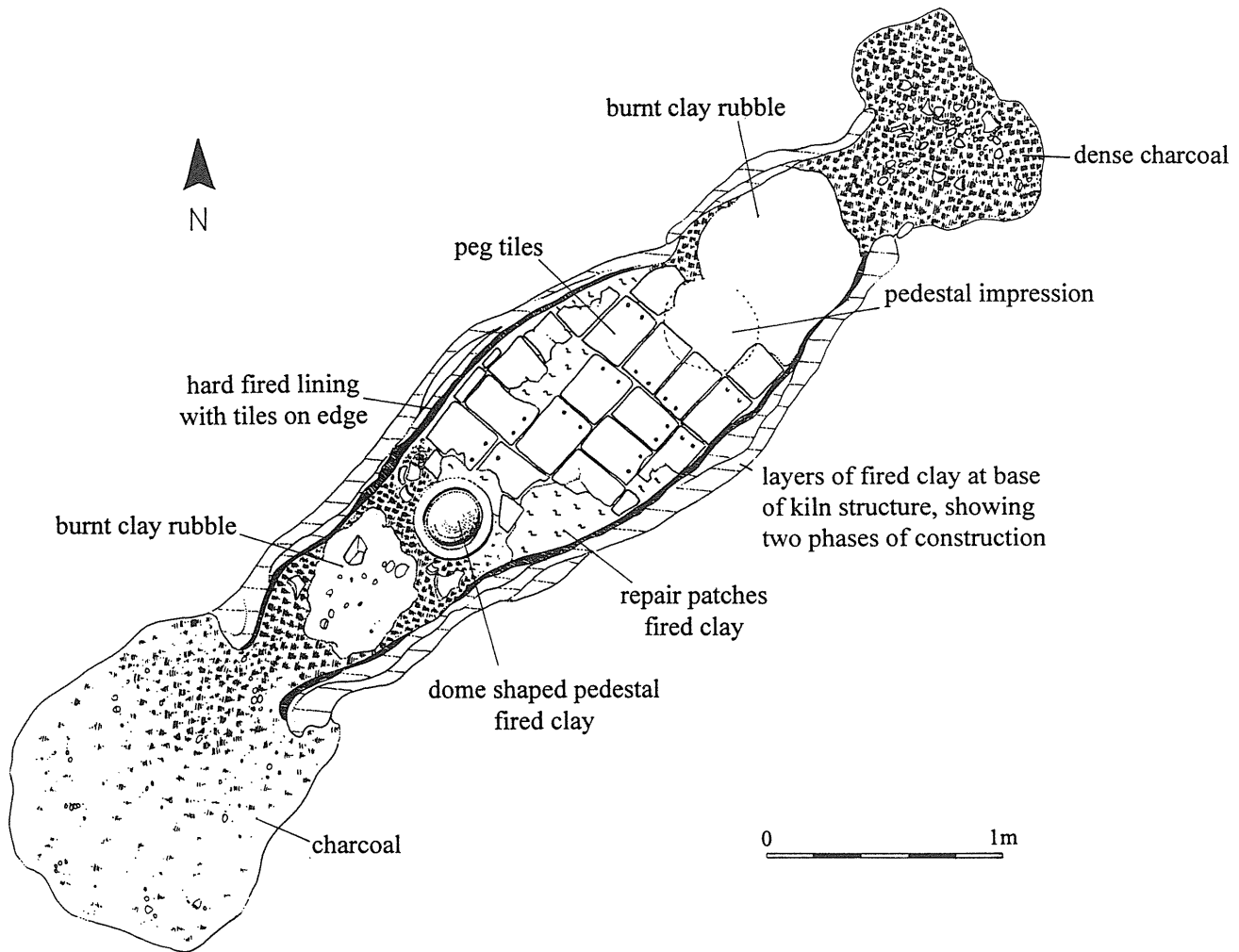


Fig. 2. Plan of the kiln at West Street, Rickinghall Inferior.

Suffolk apportionments which do not have field names. The earlier Enclosure Map (SRO 1815) shows some field names, but in general these are located around the parish boundary. The manorial records, though dispersed, are particularly full and the search was concentrated on two surveys of 1607 (SRO 1607) and 1608 (SRO 1608) and a transcript of an extent of 1436 (SRO 1436).

References were found to 'Pottersland', and by using the abutments of the property it was possible to establish that the area was to the east of West Street, but not part of the frontage. There were no references to any kiln and it must be assumed that this formed part of the outbuildings of the dwellings. There was also evidence for some decline in the importance of the area in the 16th century, judging by the number of abandoned tenements and the removal of the windmill to a new site.

Using the names of the owners of Pottersland — Browns in the late 14th century, followed by Chapmans and then Hubbards at the end of the 16th century — combined with the names of owners of a

property in West Street, a further search was carried out for evidence from Probate records. The indices (Serjeant 1979, 1984) themselves do not list any potters in Suffolk in this period and the wills do not add any new evidence. One of the last owners of Pottersland, Abraham Gleed, was a weaver (Evans 1987) and this may suggest that the kiln had ceased operation by 1635. However the operation of the kiln may not have been the principal occupation of any of the copyholders.

The area holds further archaeological interest, not just for the abandoned tenements and possible mill site. The tithe map showed various ponds in the area, some of which are probably not natural, and there is documentary evidence for both hemp and linen production in the vicinity.

#### THE KILN

by J. Caruth and D. Gill

During water mains replacement by Anglian Water in West Street, Rickinghall Inferior, the base of a

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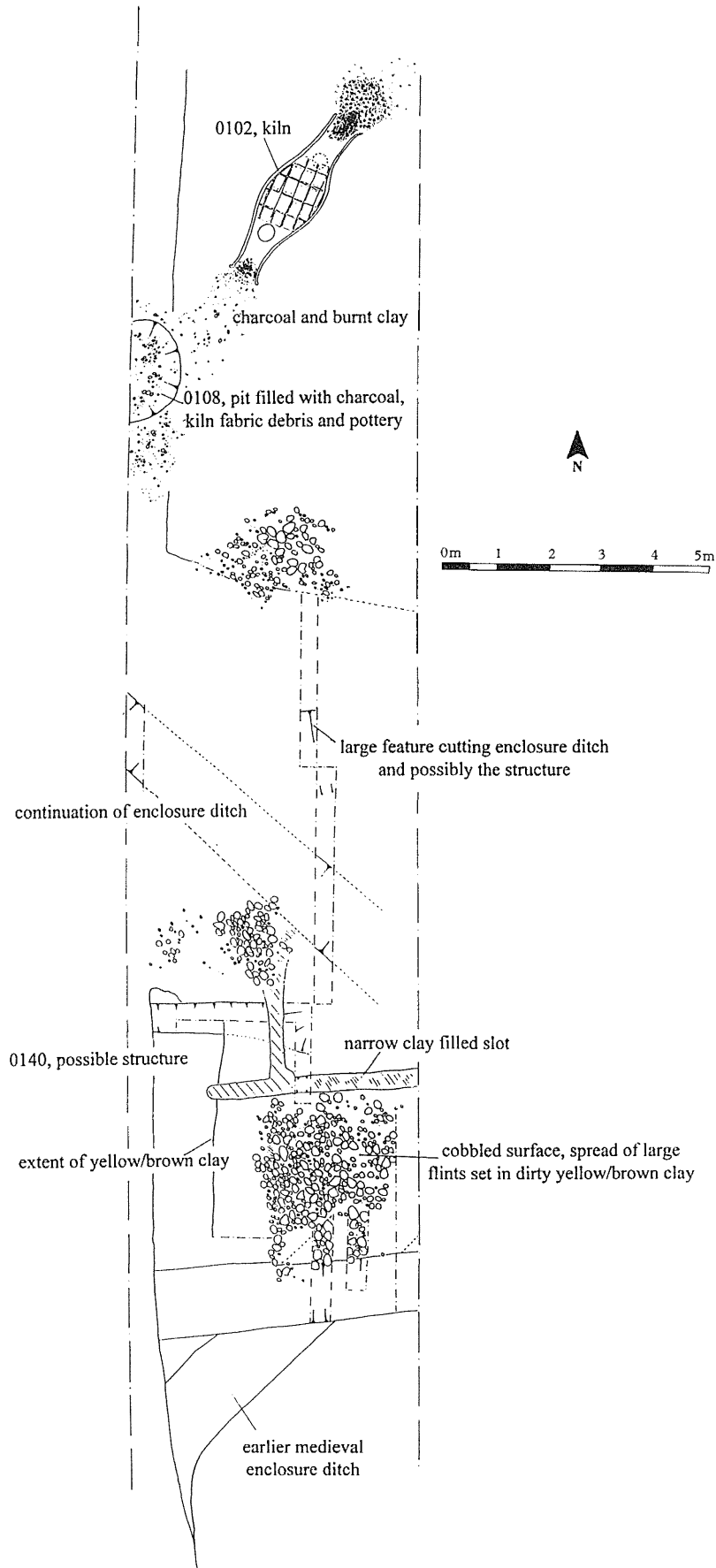


Fig. 3. Plan of the excavation showing all features mentioned in the text.

kiln and associated features were uncovered where topsoil had been removed from a 7m wide strip along the east edge of the road.

The kiln (context 0102) was of Musty's Type 2 (Musty 1974), 3.68m long and 88cm wide, with an oval firing chamber and opposing flues. The sides and floor were constructed of two phases of fired clay with peg-tiled surfaces on the floor and sides of the firing chamber (Fig. 2). Two circular 'pedestals' c. 40cm in diameter stood in the firing chamber in front of the flues. Only standing c. 7cm higher than the floor surface, these appeared to be the base support for removable structures, probably baffles.

At the south-west end of the kiln was a pit (0108) filled with dark charcoally loam and containing a large quantity of pottery wasters and fired clay kiln debris, the presence of which indicate that the pit was open either whilst the kiln was in use or at the end of its life. The function of the pit was not clear, but there was no evidence of burning *in situ*.

To the south of the kiln the remains of a structure (0140) cut by a large feature were identified (Fig. 3). The surviving features comprised fragments of a crude cobbled surface made up of a single course of large flints pressed into a dirty yellow/brown clay and bordered on its northern edge by an east-west aligned, narrow, clay-filled slot, probably a wall footing. A shallow line of unfired clay, extending north from and at right angles to the clay slot, may also indicate the footing for a wall or internal feature. The clay slot and dirty clay layer finished along a rough north-south line c. 4.5m east of the road edge, probably indicating the line of the eastern edge of the structure. Two east-west aligned gullies may also have been associated with it.

The pottery recovered from the structure was the same as that found in association with the kiln and it therefore seems that they were contemporary. It is unlikely that it can be interpreted as a dwelling as it appears structurally too crude, although the cobbling implies the need for a durable surface and it may demonstrate the position of workshops for pot-drying and/or clay storage.

Earlier phases of medieval activity on the site were indicated by roadside ditches and an enclosure which appeared to pre-date the road-line.

## THE POTTERY

by Sue Anderson

### Rickingham Wares

#### *Quantification*

Excavations produced a total of 1699 sherds weighing 25.921kg. Of these, two (19g) are from a single Iron Age flint-tempered vessel, 79 (607g) are

medieval coarsewares, two (9g) are German stonewares, and the remainder (1616 sherds, 25.286kg) are products of the kiln. The *estimated vessel equivalent* (EVE) for the whole group is 10.4, but a number of rims are wasters or too small for measurement. There is a maximum of 120 separate rims. In comparison with other local kiln groups this is a very small quantity, but is probably due to the nature of the excavation.

#### *Fabrics*

Only one basic fabric type was identified amongst the LMT material, but two other earlier fabrics were thought to be of local manufacture. All three are described below.

**RKSW1:** Rickingham Sandy Ware. The fabric is generally hard with a powdery feel, and is orange or reddish buff (5YR 6/6 or 7/6 Munsell) with a grey or buff core. Inclusions consist of common white and clear rounded quartz < 0.5mm in diameter, sparse coarse ferrous oxide 0.5–3.0mm across, and sparse calcareous fragments c. 2mm in diameter. Vessels are wheelmade, and occasionally glazed or slipped. Forms as RKSW2 below.

**RKSW2:** Rickingham Sandy Ware Reduced. Light buff or pale grey (10YR 7/1 or 2.5Y 7/2) with a grey core. The inclusions are the same as RKSW1, but the fabric is slightly harder and the firing has darkened the inclusions. The ferrous oxide and some of the quartz appear black in colour. Vessels are generally cooking pots or jars, but at least one bowl was also identified.

**RKN1:** Rickingham Ware (LMT). The fabric varies from a hard orange/buff (5YR 6/8 or 7/8, or 5YR 5/4) with grey core to a uniform hard dark grey. Most of the darker sherds are wasters, although some may have been intentionally reduced and high-fired. Unglazed soft orange sherds are also common, but are probably biscuit-fired wasters which broke before glaze was applied. As there are problems with identifying differences between intentional and accidental overfiring, the two types have been recorded as a single fabric based on inclusions. The major inclusions are moderate very fine quartz (0.1–0.2 mm), moderate or common mica (0.1–0.2 mm), sparse ferrous oxide or possibly dark red grog (1–3 mm) and occasional chalk (< 5 mm). In some sherds, clay lenses, small black inclusions or occasional large fragments of quartz are visible. The pottery is generally glazed green or brown on one surface, and vessel forms include jugs, large jars, dishes, pancheons, bowls, dripping dishes, pipkins and cisterns.

#### *The Medieval Pottery*

The small amount of wheelmade medieval

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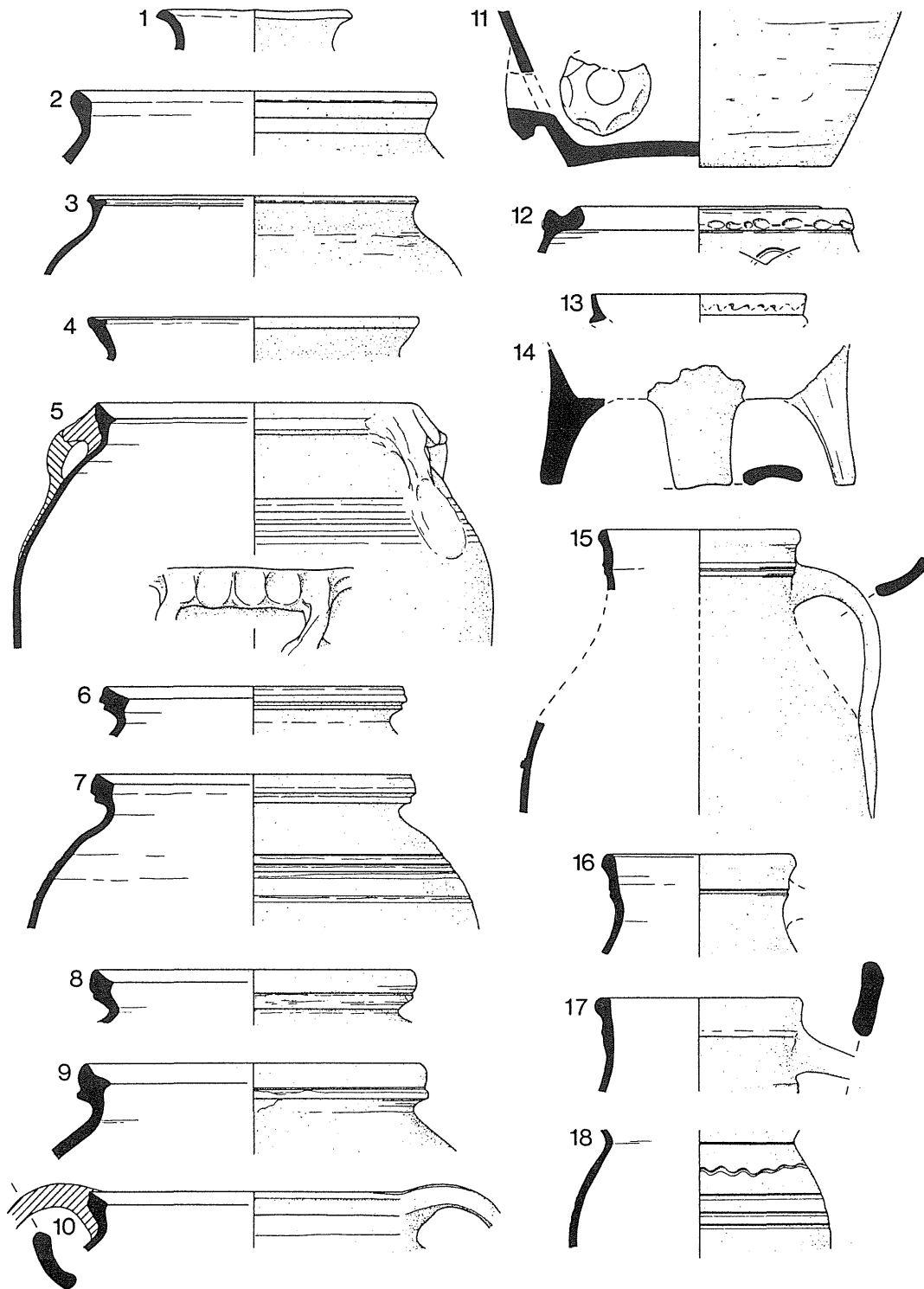


Fig. 4. The pottery: hollow wares. 1-4 medieval jars; 5-9 LMT jars; 10 ?cistern/jar; 11 cistern; 12-14 ?pipkins; 15-18 jugs. Scale 1:4.

coarseware recovered does not suggest that it was manufactured on this site. However, some of it was sufficiently similar in both fabric and form to the later pottery from the kiln and associated features to suggest that it could have been a precursor to the LMT industry, in Rickinghall or one of the surrounding villages. These 'Rickinghall Sandy Wares' (Fabrics RKS1 and 2) occurred in a

number of features across the site and suggested a background domestic scatter rather than industrial waste. This is supported by the sooting and wear which was observed on some of the sherds, together with their occurrence in pits containing unprovenanced medieval coarsewares. Most of the identifiable vessels are probably of later medieval date (13th-15th century approximately;

Fig. 4, Nos. 2–4), although a few rims are of early medieval type (late 11th–12th century, Fig. 4, No. 1).

#### *The Late Medieval and Transitional Pottery*

The major groups of LMT pottery from this excavation are derived from three distinct areas — the kiln (0102), a large pit (0108) and a possible structure (0140). All were broadly contemporary, as shown by the presence of pieces from the same vessel in two or more contexts, both within and outside the kiln. Matches between the kiln contexts and the large pit were particularly common. This suggests that the two were open at the same time and were filled with wasters lying around the kiln when it was finally abandoned. In comparison with the sherds from these two features, the large group from the structure showed a much higher degree of abrasion, suggesting that they had remained on the surface for much longer before being buried.

The pottery itself consists largely of overfired wasters. Sherds are usually glazed on one side only and the glazing is always in a similar area on similar vessels. Most flatwares (dishes, bowls, pancheons etc.) tend to have speckled copper green glaze on the lower half of the inside, whilst hollow wares have glaze around the rim and inside on the lower half (jars, cisterns, pipkins, etc.) or externally on the upper half of the body (jugs). Occasionally the glaze is thick and greenish-brown in colour, and may be a thick, even, dark brown on some of the very grey sherds. Although this could be due to overfiring, in some cases it may have been intentional. A characteristic of the hollow wares is a wide band of horizontal grooves around the upper part of the body.

#### *Forms*

As would be expected for a group of this period, the range of forms is wider than is usually found in a medieval assemblage, but is not so varied as in a post-medieval group. As noted above, vessel forms include jugs, large jars, dishes, pancheons, bowls, dripping dishes, pipkins and cisterns. A basic description of each type is provided below.

**Jars** (Fig. 4, Nos. 5–9): Large jars with complex thickened and hollowed rims, some of which form lid seatings, are the commonest type. These usually have large thumbled lugs with short narrow handles at each end. The lugs are luted to the necks and the short handles are fixed to the body by flattened and widened ends (Fig. 4, No. 5). The hollowed part of the rim and the lower part of the interior are usually glazed. These vessels usually have bands of horizontal grooves. Rims vary in diameter from 150 to 240 mm. Most have flat bases.

**Cisterns** (Fig. 4, No. 11): Only the lower halves of cisterns were positively identified, although it is

likely that some of the ‘jar’ rims belonged to vessels of this type. Two vessels with simple bungholes, flat bases and internal glaze were found.

**Pipkins** (Fig. 4, Nos. 12–14): Sherds and rims of pipkins are very similar to those of jars and have not been positively identified. However, one tripod leg (Fig. 4, No. 14) was found and probably came from a vessel of this type, and two unusual (for this group) bifid rims (Fig. 4, Nos. 12–13) may also have belonged to pipkins.

**Jugs** (Fig. 4, Nos. 15–18): The common form is a narrow-necked jug with a slightly globular body and a plain strap handle. The rim is usually plain, rounded and slightly flaring. There are one or two incised horizontal grooves on the neck, and a band of horizontal grooves around the top of the body. Glaze is generally sparsely applied onto the neck and top of the body and may be on one side only. Occasional patches are found on the underside of the handle. A small lip is pulled out from the rim. Rims between 100 and 130 mm in diameter.

**Pancheons, dishes and bowls** (Fig. 5, Nos. 21–26): These are large vessels between 260 and 460 mm in diameter. Rims are very similar in basic design to those of jars. A number are decorated with a simple incised wavy line on the hollow. Most finished vessels have speckled green glaze on the lower half of the inside. Two small lips from vessels of this type were identified.

**Miscellaneous:** A few sherds, rims, handles and bases of dripping dishes (Fig. 5, No. 19), and one sherd of a thin-walled green-glazed mug or tankard (not illustrated) were found.

#### **Other LMT Wares**

A brief description of the main fabric types from each kiln group is provided below with the exceptions of Wisset and Chediston, material from which was not available for study. Forms are all very similar to those from Rickingham, although those from Hopton tend to exhibit a greater degree of applied decoration on the handles. All are hard, with a powdery feel and smooth fracture, unless otherwise stated. A summary is provided in Table 1. Fabric descriptions were compiled using a  $\times 10$  microscope, but thin section analysis of the pottery is forthcoming and will be available in archive.

#### *Wattisfield*

Dark orange fabric (5YR 6/6), sometimes with purple core, occasionally lighter in colour (7.5YR 7/6) with light grey core. Contains abundant clear, white and some red quartz (0.1–0.3mm), moderate very fine mica, and sparse to moderate ferrous oxide ( $< 1\text{mm}$ ). The Roman pottery from this parish is heavily micaceous.

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Table 1. Size and frequency of inclusions in Wattisfield area LMT fabrics.

Parish	Clear quartz	White quartz	Red quartz	Mica	Fe Oxide	Chalk	Flint
Rickingham	0.1–0.5mm Moderate	0.1–0.2mm Sparse	0.1–0.2mm Moderate	V. Fine Common	1–3mm Sparse	1–5mm Occasional	
Wattisfield	0.1–0.3mm Moderate	0.1–0.2mm Common	0.1–0.2mm Sparse	V. Fine Moderate	<1mm Sparse		
Hinderclay	0.2–0.8mm Common	0.1mm Sparse	0.1–0.3mm Sparse	V. Fine Sparse	<1mm Sparse	<1mm Occasional	
Hopton	0.1–0.7mm Common	0.1mm Sparse	0.1–0.3mm Common	V. Fine Sparse	0.5+ mm Moderate	c.1mm Occasional	V. coarse Occasional
Weybread	0.2–0.8mm Abundant	0.1–0.2mm Sparse		V. Fine Uncommon	0.2–0.3mm Sparse	<2mm Occasional	
Metfield	0.1–0.5mm Abundant	0.1–0.5mm Sparse			0.05–0.1mm Common		
Mendham	0.1–0.3mm Moderate	0.05–0.1mm Sparse			0.05–0.3mm Common		V. coarse Occasional
South Elmham	0.1mm Common	0.1mm Sparse		V. Fine Sparse	<1mm Sparse		

*Hinderclay*

Uniform pale orange or red fabric (7.5YR 7/6, 5YR 7/6 or 6/4), occasionally with a grey core. Contains abundant sub-rounded clear, red and sometimes white quartz (0.1–0.8mm), sparse sub-rounded ferrous oxide (< 1mm), occasional chalk (< 1mm), and sparse very fine mica (more visible in section under the microscope than on the surface). Lenses of white clay may be visible in paler sherds. Thicker sherds are generally coarser with a greater proportion of quartz.

*Hopton*

Orange fabric (7.5YR 6/4, 5YR 7/6, 2.5YR 6/4) slightly streaked with white. Contains abundant sub-rounded red, clear and white quartz (0.1–0.7mm diameter), moderate dark rounded inclusions of ferrous oxide of similar size or larger, and sparse very fine mica. Occasionally there are coarse or very coarse pieces of flint.

*Weybread*

Orange-red (7.5YR 7/6, 5YR 6/4) fabric often with grey core. Contains abundant sub-rounded clear and white quartz (0.1–0.8mm), sparse angular or sub-rounded ferrous oxide (0.2–0.3mm), sparse lenses of sandy grog (<2mm), and occasional chalk (< 2mm). Mica is very uncommon but does occur in some sherds and may be moderate to common in frequency.

*Metfield*

Red-buff or orange fabric (2.5YR 5/8, 5YR 7/8 or

6/6), sometimes with a grey outer surface and core. Abundant clear and white quartz (0.1–0.5mm), and common ferrous oxide (0.05–0.1 mm, occasionally coarser).

*Mendham*

Brick red fabric with orangey buff surfaces (5YR 6/8). Contains common/abundant clear and white sand (0.05–0.3mm), common ferrous oxide (0.05–0.3mm, but occasionally up to 3mm), and occasional flint (very coarse). This material includes some earlier very sandy wares similar to (or the same as) those found at Rickingham.

*South Elmham St. James*

Brick red fabric, sometimes with orangey buff or grey surfaces (2.5YR 6/8, 5YR 7/6 or 6/6 or 7/1). Contains abundant white and clear quartz (0.1–0.3mm), sparse mica, and sparse coarse ferrous oxide (this is much less frequent than in other kiln groups).

CONCLUSIONS

The Rickingham LMT vessel forms are similar to those found throughout the region at this period, and identification of products from specific kilns may prove difficult on consumer sites until further work has been carried out on all the assemblages. However, the fabrics are different enough to enable the products of the Wattisfield area kilns to be distinguished from those of the Waveney Valley with relative ease.

Pottery from the Waveney Valley has been found



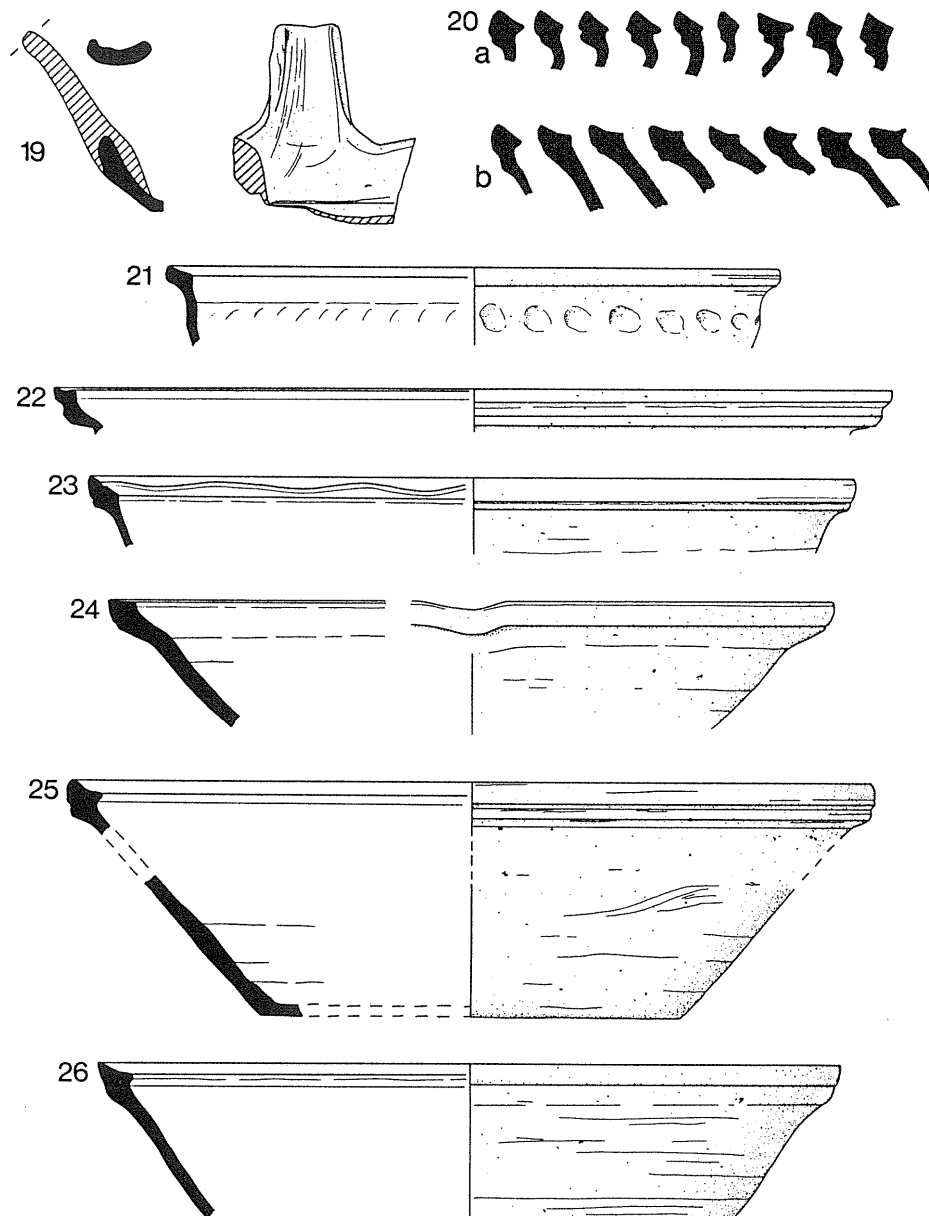


Fig. 5. The pottery: 'flatwares'. 19 dripping dish; 21-22 medieval bowls; 23-26 pancheons. Rim types 20a 'jars'; 20b 'dishes/pancheons'. Scale 1:4.

on excavations in Norwich, and presumably this area also supplied the market in Ipswich, although very little LMT material has been identified there to date. Products from Rickinghall itself have not been identified in Norwich, but they have been found at a nearby site across the Waveney in Norfolk<sup>1</sup>. This suggests that potters in Rickinghall may have been supplying local settlements rather than the larger regional towns. The industry seems to have been more prosperous in the area around Weybread, and it was probably these potteries which were sending their products to the city.

Although the kiln at Rickinghall may have been involved in only small-scale production, it is nevertheless important as part of a wider industry which,

to a large extent, represents the changes which were taking place in the transition between the medieval period and the modern world.

#### Footnote

1. Recent fieldwork at Hall Farm, Fersfield, by Sue Anderson.

#### APPENDIX 1

##### Catalogue of Illustrations (Figures 4-5)

All vessels are in Fabric RKN1 unless otherwise stated.

- 1-4. Medieval jars (1-3 RKS2, 4 MCW).
- 5-9. Jars.
- 10. ?Cistern, jar or pipkin rim.

11. Bung-hole cistern base.
12. Pipkin with thumbled rim and incised wavy line decoration. Green-glazed externally.
13. ?Pipkin rim with incised wavy line decoration.
14. Tripod leg from pipkin. Originally luted into place.
- 15-17. Jugs. All overfired with burnt or dark brown glaze.
18. Jug or small jar with incised wavy line decoration. Overfired purple fabric.
19. Dripping dish.
20. Basic rim types: a) 'jars', b) 'dishes/pancheons'.
- 21-22. Medieval bowls (RKS<sub>W</sub>2).
- 23-26. Pancheons. Most in soft orange fabric, unglazed (biscuit fired?).

#### Acknowledgements

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#### Résumé

Des fouilles récentes à West Street, Rickingham Inferior, ont révélé un four de potier et des produits associés, datant du Bas Moyen Age. Cette découverte a permis une étude comparative limitée envers les fours de pareille date découverts auparavant dans les paroisses voisines de Hopton, Wattisfield et Hinderclay. Des descriptions seront présentées de types céramiques venant d'autres groupements de four de la Waveney Valley, et leurs types morphologiques seront discutés par rapport à la tradition céramique du Bas Moyen Age et de la période transitionnelle (LMT) dans l'East Anglia.

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#### Zusammenfassung

Jüngste Ausgrabungen in West Street, Rickingham Inferior, zeigten einen spät mittelalterlichen Brennofen und zugehörige Gegenstände. Diese Entdeckung ermöglichte vergleichende Studien mit früher in den Nachbargemeinden Hopton, Wallisfield und Hinderclay gefundenen Öfen. Die Bauarten anderer, im Waveney Tal gefundener Öfen werden dargestellt und ihre verschiedenen Formen in Beziehung zur spät mittelalterlichen und Übergangs-Töpfertradition (LMT) in East Anglia gesetzt und diskutiert.