stages of the potting process. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to identify at what stage a waster was discarded, as similar effects could have different causes. For instance, fracturing could be caused by excessive heating or cooling of a vessel. It is not therefore possible to identify any one stage in the process which was more prone to produce wasters.

FURTHER WORK

There are certain constraints on the interpretation of kiln material, in that groups of wasters are the rejects from the production process. Groups of wasters do not give an accurate reflection of overall successful production, and therefore cannot be seen as representative quantitatively of what was demanded by the consumers. However, the range of vessels produced can be determined, as well as those forms which were prone to failure. Quantification of primary dumps of pottery is currently being undertaken to compare the material with other assemblages, such as that recovered from the nearby Knapp Drewett site which has an archaeomagnetic date of 1345–1375 (Vince 1985). This should show whether any changes took place in the overall make-up of production, or whether there were any fundamental changes in the technology; for instance, if any errors were corrected between groups at Eden Street, or at other later sites.

In addition to a statistical breakdown of specific dumps of wasters, the final publication will include a fully illustrated typology of the range of forms produced at the site. Coupled to this will be a detailed commentary on the technology, and on the nature and extent of the pottery defects.

The kiln material from Eden Street has a very important contribution to make to the dating of Kingston-type ware. If the archaeomagnetic dates can be associated with a specific range of forms and decoration types there are important implications for refining the dating of assemblages of pottery recovered from elsewhere in London. Already the presence of lobed cup fragments is important in this group, since this is a form previously dated to the late 14th century, and the latest archaeomagnetic date from the site is 1300–1325.

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

THE AGE OF TRANSITION: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF ENGLISH CULTURE 1400–1600

A Conference held at the British Museum, London, 14–15 November 1996

It was appropriate that the first joint meeting between The Society for Medieval Archaeology and The Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology should concentrate on what divides them, the process of transition out of the medieval period. Some 125 delegates attended the British Museum in November 1996, and speakers included historians and archaeologists both academic and field.

Hugh Tait, a founding member of the SPMA, gave an admirable introduction to visual change, from the medieval and Gothic of 1400 to the Renaissance and allegorical paintings of 1600. He defined civilised society as one where freedom of mind was encouraged; this had been the strength of Florence where the spirit of criticism was already abroad. North of the Alps it was a period when new global horizons were opening minds to the tradition of antiquity; in England the court of Henry VII no longer used French, and by the second quarter of the sixteenth century every church had a bible in English rather than Latin. Learning was an integral part of life for the Elizabethan nobility, and knowledge of fine arts was part of that learning; everyone could become a gentleman. By 1600 intellectual freedom and the competitive spirit to achieve great things had been established in Britain; the true renaissance spirit.

Paul Courtney was sceptical of the historian's analysis of the great divide. Archaeologists, he felt, could do much to show the long-term change experienced by more ordinary households, and to study the complexities and interconnectedness of change within and between societies. In particular, archaeology can address the document impoverished groups who are often assumed to have had no active material culture. A witty overview by Frans Verhaeghe argued that every category of artefact had a different cultural cycle; the mechanisms for change were set in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but the speed of change differed and different transitions occurred between then and the eighteenth century, a pattern that English archaeologists were to confirm later in the conference. He too stressed the regional differences in northern Europe. Each Flemish town had its own identity: architectural styles varied, some maintained the medieval building type while in others the middle class house had grown vertically. The medieval street layout in some Flemish towns remained unchanged until the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a phenomenon paralleled in many English towns. By the later sixteenth century major changes in warfare generated new fortification, while the rural world remained conservative. From an art historical point of view he could identify a marked change about 1500, but lamented the lack of theoretical framework and recommended a more holistic approach.

Helmut Hundsbichler's central thesis was that new knowledge of the past does not change history but reveals what has not been apparent before. He illustrated his contribution with pictorial sources of Austria and Central Europe, mainly of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, housed in his institute's collection at Krems in Austria. Chris Dyer showed how well placed archaeologists were to challenge questions of change, particularly amongst the

peasantry — they can show short-term changes while historians focus on long term trends. Simon Thurley considered transition as it affected the most excavated of England's historic royal palaces, Whitehall, and concluded that the palace defies neat divisions, transcending both medieval and modern concepts. Its evolution and structure shows the innovation of new ideas and organisation, but these had yet to be reflected in the architectural unity of the whole.

Nicholas Cooper broadened the architectural approach by investigating the pattern of function and occupancy of a house, for instance where the lord slept, focusing on sixteenth century houses of the gentry. Inventories show a certain flexibility in function existed — the owner's sleeping arrangements migrated from the high end of the hall to the low end of the house by the late sixteenth century — a substantial change in two generations. A similar flexibility of outlook was to be found in religion as demonstrated by Richard Morris. References from Shakespeare showed that despite the social metamorphosis of the Reformation, ordinary people were still familiar with Catholic belief fully fifty years later. Jonathan Coad concluded the first day by considering the changing technology of warfare. In this field he demonstrated a radical period of innovation and change which was to be unparalleled again until the mid-nineteenth century.

On the second day Martin Biddle presented a golden oldie, Nonsuch Palace. Addressing the spatial patterning of finds, he set out to establish who had cleaned out the twenty garderobes, and why eleven of them still contained their rubbish. This material could be attributed to the occupation of a middle ranking family in the 1670's–80's but raised interesting questions relating to the use, longevity and heirloom nature of the finds. Philip Lindley addressed the transition theme, and stressed that 'antique was fashionable' on tomb sculpture, whether the craftsmen were French, Netherlandish or Florentine: here the essence of transition was 'disruption rather than continuity'.

In considering civic buildings and courtier houses Maurice Howard noted how archaeology has changed our perception of the great house — architectural decoration here was inspired by the royal palaces, which were often elaborately but transiently decorated with superficial materials for visual impact. When trade was depressed the same styles were adopted in civic buildings when a town needed to find a new identity. Local traditional methods of construction affected the way architectural decoration evolved but it was towards the end of the sixteenth century before a real change could be observed. At that point a growing confidence in the architectural unity of a building and the permanency of its construction superseded the tradition of superficial decoration.

On a broader plane John Schofield explored residential patterns in London over the transition period. In central London by the end of the fourteenth century the living room tended to be on the upper floor with an undercroft shop, so we should be looking for artefacts associated with the living quarters upstairs. Matthew Johnson moved into the country to consider the evolution of vernacular buildings. He hoped to see 1400-1600 studied as a period in its own right, with the evolution from open halls to private rooms mirroring changes in social structure and organisation. The buildings survive as cultural documents around which new frameworks and theories need to be built.

In the specific field of ceramics, David Gaimster and Beverley Nenk argued that pottery and tile were mirrors of social change: new commodities, new communities, the rise of imported ceramics — there was both continuity and discontinuity. From the early fifteenth century an expanding variety of ceramic utensils was in use in the home, new modes of interior decoration — lighting and heating technology and tile floors, ornamental brick hearths and ceramic tile-stoves. Meanwhile the exceptional survival of archaeobotanical evidence from London was compared by John Giorgi with inventories, custom accounts and documentary evidence to illustrate the very diverse range of vegetables and fruits available to London consumers, some grown locally, others imported.

Turning to new concepts of design, John Cherry stressed that heraldry had been a vehicle for the display of magnificence from the twelfth century. Following a long period of continuity, the iconography did change with the adoption of Renaissance motifs about 1520. Later sixteenth century dress accessories were illustrated by Geoff Egan and Hazel Forsyth, rescued from the few deposits at the top of the archaeological sequence which survived the introduction of cellars. The final paper by Kay Staniland outlined how fashion and clothing were continuously changing during the medieval period, beginning about 1330 AD. For the period 1400–1600 there were many changes for both sexes, and the sixteenth century saw a new sector of the London textile industry emerging — the knitted silk stocking.

A number of themes recurred through the conference, perhaps the most important being the way that topographical, architectural and iconagraphical studies can fill out the artefactual and documentary record. The conference may not have reached any conclusion about the validity or otherwise of an age of transition. But in many ways this was not the point. The object was to place the period 1400–1600 centre stage rather than having it fall at the margins of two adjoining chunks of history. Period boundaries are a convenient product of historians and, at times, can obscure the social and cultural links which bridge them. This conference has shown that societies evolve as a complex web of interrelated strands, each of which can move at a different rate. To understand the past is to understand each of these strands and to formulate models which are sufficiently sensitive and complex to explain them and their relationship to the whole. The 'age of transition' is as valid a period as any other and the challenge is to explain it rather than argue over its existence. This was a stimulating two days with a high quality of intellectual content.

Maureen Mellor and David Higgins

CONFERENCE REPORT: WORCESTER 1997

The annual residential conference of the MPRG was held at Worcester from 12–14 May 1997. The Conference theme was *Pots in Use*, a departure for the group, which normally examines a particular period or locality. The papers took a varied approach to the topic, but were consistent in not being simply a list of the various functions of ceramics attested through documentary sources or contemporary illustrations.

The theme was set by M. Mellor who presented a masterly synthesis of ceramic use in the British Isles from the 9th/10th century to the 18th. Her sources were both archaeological and pictorial; the value of paintings and manuscript illuminations to study pottery use (and the role of alternatives) formed a lively sub-theme in several papers and discussions.

A gratifying aspect of the conference was the broad chronological scope of many of the papers and the realisation that pottery use fluctuated and was sometimes rapidly transformed as a result of changes in diet and custom. Wine, beer, tea and coffee drinking were all discussed in detail,