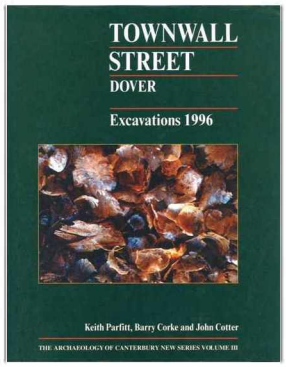
**Keith Parfitt, Barry Corke and John Cotter**
Townwall Street, Dover Excavations 1996
2006 . Canterbury Archaeological Trust Ltd
Hardback, 459 pages, 240 figures, 79 tables




Dover is a mysterious place. A lot of people go there, but they're all on the way to somewhere else, so I for one have but a slender grasp of the character of the place or the people. I know there's a big castle, and there's been a lighthouse there since Roman times, and of course there are those white cliffs. In some way that chalk makes Dover quintessentially English, whatever that means. Although when one recalls that this is a port, we should be a little more thoughtful; after all ports house some of the most cosmopolitan communities. I should know, I've been studying the archaeology of Southampton for long enough. Just like my adopted home, Dover has a long and complex history, and we'd be wrong to characterise it too readily solely as a place of transit. If you're in any way interested in coastal communities, international traffic, ports and their hinterlands, medieval fishing, the poorer end of the medieval domestic spectrum or even just medieval pottery and archaeology in general, then this book is for you. This absolutely comprehensive account of probably the most thoroughly executed excavations ever of medieval houses in Dover is a triumph. A triumph, it must be emphasised, on many levels. The whole volume is extremely well presented and organised. Keith Parfitt supplies an admirably concise introduction, before considering the topography and historical background of the site, with the history of Dover outlined by Sheila Sweetinburgh. There follows one hundred pages describing the excavations, phase by phase, structure by structure, with John Cotter's commentary on the pottery and chronology woven in. Eight separate building plots in Period 1, dating from the late 12th century to around 1300, were identified, although due to the usual constraints imposed by the developers, three of these could not be examined in detail. These were the houses of poor fishing families, mariners and dock workers, some with yards, the largest plot measuring ten by fifteen metres. They were sited beneath the towering castle, a fair step away from the centre of the town, where no doubt their social position was inescapable. Houses of this nature are a rare find in medieval urban excavations, and that in itself makes this an important project. The pottery from Period 1 (over 28,000 sherds) was derived mostly from production centres in Kent, mainly those that also supplied nearby Canterbury. Other English wares, including London and Scarborough types comprised around 3% of the totals, while there was a slightly higher proportion of Continental imports, mainly from northern France and the Low Countries. Period 2, from around 1300 to 1550 followed the abandonment of the earlier dwellings and their replacement with stone structures. The level of pottery consumption seems to have fallen sharply after 1300 and the decision was taken to concentrate ceramic study on the Period 1 material. This is slightly frustrating, although forgivable given the lack of resources available during post-excavation. Cotter does provide a useful summary of the later wares, with a table of quantities, but it is a shame we have been denied a full comparison of the pottery from each period. Even so, the pottery report occupies 130 pages, which includes a comprehensive, quantified, fully illustrated catalogue of the Period 1 finds. As we've come to expect from John Cotter, this is meticulously presented, with fabrics and forms described in full. One might take issue with a table of fabric quantities that extends over three pages, or query the use of sherd count and weight only, but that would be churlish. This is a grand catalogue of the major East Kent pottery types, with plenty of other wares thrown in, and is therefore a very useful resource. I'm still concerned, however, with the terms we pottery specialists apply to various Continental wares. Cotter's 'Rouen-type Polychrome ware' seems to include the 'classic' Rouen-type jug and another type with zoomorphic decoration. The''classic' Rouen-type jugs are not polychrome, because only two colours are in evidence, so we should be careful what we call them. The zoomorphic jug is compared to an example in Southampton that may once have been attributed to Paris (Nicourt 1986, 247), but which I have re-assigned to the Seine Valley following analysis by Remy Guadagnin (Brown, 2002, 24). In any case, Cotter suggests a relationship between his zoomorphic jug and the production area for Normandy Gritty ware, which recent research suggests is around the Cotentin, some distance from Rouen and the Seine Valley. If he is right, then it is misleading to describe it as 'Rouen-type'. Well, he and I will doubtless talk this over, but the wider issue is that we are still in some confusion over what to call some of these types. The MPRG needs to address this, and is well-placed so to do as we establish and strengthen contacts in mainland Europe.

Sections on the coins, small finds and building materials, and the palaeo-environmental evidence, from various specialists, wrap up the descriptive element of the book, which precedes twenty pages of fascinating discussion. This final section includes deliberations on the origins of medieval Dover, the medieval fishing industry, other crafts and industries, water supply and rubbish disposal, and changes in medieval occupation. There are also ten pages of discussion of the pottery evidence. This is what pottery reports should be, a presentation of the character of the assemblage, and an interpretation of its meaning within wider contexts. Cotter acknowledges the limitations of the work he was

able to do, and quite rightly states that, if nothing else he has identified areas for future research. He has though, achieved more than that, as has the entire publication. His discussion is measured and thoughtful, and he examines pottery supply, the influence of the Continent, the fishing industry and the Cinque Ports, pottery as an indicator of status, and pottery use. It is very satisfying to see a specialist's ideas combined with the interpretation of the site as a whole. It is especially useful to read his thoughts on pottery supply, and the acquisition of pots from a variety of sources and by a variety of means. The role of the sea, even possibly in carrying pots from Canterbury to Dover, cannot be ignored, but it was of course the people that really mattered. Dover, more than most other ports, witnessed a huge throughput of travellers, fisher-folk, mariners and even pirates, and all of them crop up in Cotter's lucid discussion.

For all the quality of the reports on the excavation, the pottery, and indeed the other finds, it is the preface that really defines the value of this book. Paul Bennett pulls few punches in his summary of the conditions under which it was produced: 'In these days of archaeological sampling strategies, the Townwall Street report is unusual in that it is a full and detailed account of a meticulous and thorough excavation. We have been able to achieve this ... not with additional funding (for we have been held to account in the strictest fashion by the archaeological consultant protecting his client's interest), but by volunteer efforts in the field ... [and] a prodigious amount of unpaid time by the principal authors'. As well as, he adds, financial contributions from the Canterbury Archaeological Trust, their Friends and others. He goes on to rail against contract archaeology which''is rapidly diminishing the academic rigour brought to projects by teams of local experts building on decades of research and first-hand knowledge of the area'. There is no doubt that this comprehensive publication should be held up as a reminder of what archaeologists can, and should, achieve. Paul Bennett concludes that''my earnest hope is that this volume with all it implies for thoroughness and integrity will stand the test of time and the current parlous state of British archaeology will not'. I suggest you acquire a copy of this volume now, if only to support the future of British archaeology. If you do, you will also enjoy a thoroughly readable discussion of a place from which we could all learn something. Dover? It was a mysterious place.

### References

Brown, DH, 2002, 'Pottery in Medieval Southampton c1066–1510' Southampton Archaeology Monographs 8, CBA Research Report 133.

Nicourt, J, 1986, 'Céramiques médiévales parisiennes; classification and typologie' J. P. G. F.

Duncan H Brown

## Andres Tvauri

**Eesti Hilisrauaaja Saviniud (11, Sajandist 13. Sajandi Keskpaigani)**

[Latest Iron Age Pottery in Estonia (from the 11th century to the middle of the 13th century)]

2005 . Tartu-Tallinn

197 pages, 97 figures, bibliography, price unknown

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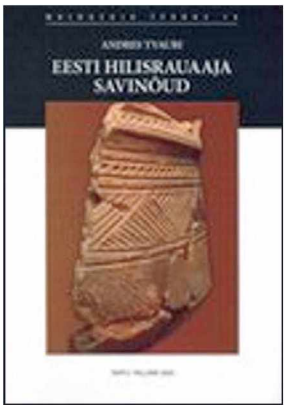


It came as shock to discover that I had agreed to review a book that had been written in Estonian. However, it proved to be easier than I had expected, because there are 57 pages of a shortened English translation, and all the captions and abbreviations are bilingual, so that about 30% of the book is actually in English. Further, the English text is cross-referenced to the illustrations (which are all in the Estonian part), so that following an argument is made simple. The illustrations are of a high quality: the pottery drawings, which benefit from a review of west European and American styles, give an excellent visual impression of the pots, while the distribution maps are beautifully clear. The only significant omission from the English part is the references, but as the headings and sub-headings in each section have the same structure, one could track down a reference in the Estonian part without too much difficulty. An index would be useful, but perhaps more so for Estonian than English-language readers. The purpose of the book is clearly stated ('to ascertain as to which types of clay vessels were used in Estonia during the Latest Iron Age Period' [*c.* 1000–1250 AD in Estonia] and to 'create an initial classification' (p. 141)). The problems to be addressed are stated as: 'When were certain types of clay vessels produced?', 'Where were clay vessels produced and what was their distribution area?' and 'Who produced clay vessels?'

The book, as they say, 'does what it says on the tin'. An introductory chapter deals with the history of ceramic research (in general and in Estonia), theory and methodology, sources of evidence, and terminology. There are two broad fabric groups: 'rough' ware (large pots, stone-tempered, thought to be used for storing and preparing food) and 'fine' ware (small pots, often bowls, thought to be used for serving food). A distinction is made between 'hand-made' and 'wheel-thrown' pottery; this may appear strange to western readers because hand-made is defined as 'produced with no use of a wheel', while wheel-thrown is defined by 'the entire surface finishing and decoration ... being made by ... the turning of the wheel' (p. 151). The author admits that this Slavic-style wheel-thrown pottery is made by