

Jacqueline Pearce

Pots and potters in Tudor Hampshire . Excavations at Farnborough Hill Convent, 1968–72

with contributions by Anthony Grey and Peter Tipton

petrology report by Alan Vince

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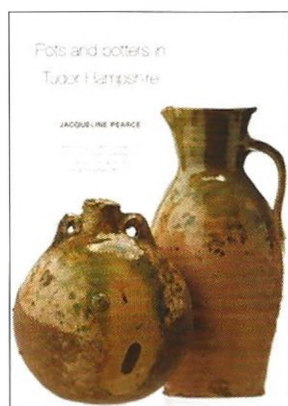
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Much of the skill of a ceramic archaeologist lies in their ability to patiently collect, analyse and tease out interpretations from large bodies of data. Production sites with their kiln structures and the vast quantities of production waste are notoriously daunting and may in part account for why so few kilns and their associated products have been systematically analysed and published in detail.

This study of a major pottery industry of the late medieval and Tudor period centres on four kilns on the borders of Hampshire and Surrey, England, dug some forty years ago. It is an exceptionally creative achievement, bringing together not only the excavations carried out between 1968–1972 by Felix Hollings, then curator of the county museum for Surrey, but also subsequently through the active collaboration between MoLAS, Guildford Museum and other Surrey museums with archaeological collections. Through a combination of excavation records, data recovered from detailed examination of the finds and the rich selection of documentary sources the author has re-evaluated and amplified our understanding of this important, innovative and versatile ceramic industry that serviced south-east England and beyond for several hundred years.

Its place in English ceramic history is explored through comparison with the data from London's consumer sites, using the dating evidence and complete vessel forms found in the capital, as well as drawing on evidence from other production sites across the country and evaluating the influences from continental Europe, in particular Beauvais, France and the Lower Rhineland, Germany.

The outcome is a detailed type-series of the various wares from Farnborough Hill, Surrey, an expansion of knowledge of the range and extent of influences at work in the Farnborough potteries which has ramifications far beyond the Blackwater Valley and south-east England. It provides insights into the transition from the late medieval coarseware tradition to the fully developed production of the early modern period,



the 'ceramic revolution' of the 15th to 16th century and its distribution – some of its products reached the early American colonies in Virginia.

Wills and inventories researched by Peter Tipton have recently broadened knowledge of the potting families of the Blackwater Valley and probable German potters are now recognised as working in Farnborough at this critical time.

Twelve chapters address each of the major areas of research and related questions and begin with: An Introduction and Overview; the Historical Background; Terminology and Fabric Characterisation; The Site and its Kilns'; the Late Medieval Coarsewares; The Late Medieval and Transitional Finewares; the Post-medieval Whitewares and Redwares; Manufacturing Processes and Problems; Fabric, Form and Function; Distribution and Marketing; Surrey–Hampshire Border Wares – Origins, Influences and Development; Conclusions and Future work; with two appendices: Characterisation Studies of Late Medieval and Post-Medieval Pottery from Farnborough Hill, Hampshire by the late Alan Vince and Quantified Data.

This study describes the different production sites centred on the Blackwater valley recognised archaeologically and from documentary and mapping evidence. This was a potting centre from the late 13th century to the 20th century. The early post-medieval Surrey–Hampshire border wares of the Tudor and Stuart periods developed out the medieval Surrey Whiteware tradition. From the mid 14th to the end of the 15th century late medieval coarsewares of the kind made at Farnborough Hill dominated London's ceramic supply at the expense of the redware industry. The late 15th and early 16th century centuries saw a change in direction for the industry perhaps in response to developments in other potteries supplying the all-important London market. After concentrating on producing sturdy utilitarian pottery for the Londoner's household for at least 200 years, the conservative industry specialised in the manufacture of high quality tableware. Farnborough Hill potteries appear to have led this 'ceramic revolution'.

During the second half of the 16th and 17th centuries Farnborough was a major producer of Surrey–Hampshire border ware during the Tudor and Stuart era. Although numerous other potting workshops were operating alongside Farnborough Hill. A close-knit community of potters with family ties developed, all sharing in a strong ceramic tradition unified by common fabrics, forms and methods of manufacture. Over a period of 150 years the industry produced good quality, attractive pottery, both white and redwares on a huge scale, catering for a wide range of household needs. By the early 18th century red earthenware ousted white firing clays in popularity. The author suggests that the close relationship with London consumers may have ensured the vitality of the Surrey–Hampshire border industry over such a long period.

The Farnborough Hill Convent kiln site is one of the few sites within the Border industry where structures and associated production waste have been found together. It is also the only site for which archaeo-magnetic dates were obtained.

The genesis of the project is interesting and began with a member of the public approaching the curator with 'a bag of pottery found in the roots of a fallen tree'. The research aims are set out and will be particularly useful to anyone contemplating compiling a research design prior to excavating or re-evaluating archival records of kilns.

In 'The Historical Background' we learn that for forty years the site was the home of the exiled Empress Eugenie of France, wife of Napoleon III. Had she known, she might have been interested that a demonstration of aristocratic patronage was evident in the village as early as the late 14th century (records for AD 1391 indicate that a carter took 229 pots from the village of Farnborough to Windsor Castle for use in the stews or bathhouse). Earlier still, green glazed Surrey Whiteware from Kingston upon Thames was supplying Westminster Palace on occasions of royal feasts between AD 1264 and 1266, indicating that these Surrey products were already highly regarded. Later institutions such as the Inns of Court also bought in bulk from the Surrey–Hampshire borders from at least the late 15th century.

Some 33 potters are known to have been working in the area between AD 1582 and 1694 with ten names for Farnborough and eleven for Cove. Robert Wright's inventory (d. 1582), includes 'claye wroughte and nwroughte ... two potting wheelles ... picking stocks, w(i)th bordes, working toules ... woodd and ledde ... potts ... timber'. He left his servant Richard Edsell 'twentye woorkinge boordes, a picking stocke for Claye and the potting wheel that he doth use to worke in furnisshede'.

A review of religious refugees coming to London follows. Harmon Raignold a potter of Farnborough, is recorded in 1586 Lay Subsidy Rolls, as an 'allian'. His will was proved in 1609. Raignold may have been German and his presence in the village coincides with a marked Rhenish influence in the style of late 16th-century pottery made at Farnborough Hill. Several vessel forms mirror white and red earthenware made in the Lower Rhineland at this period. Some of his family intermarry with neighbouring potting communities and continue as potters in the locality until at least the mid 17th century.

One of the original aims of this research was to see whether all the fabrics recorded on London excavations could be identified at Farnborough Hill, and subsequent work has shown this to be the case. This section highlights how complex it can be to interpret fabrics, when potters use a variety of clays, presumably for different types of vessels. Thus it sets out the different wares and their fabrics: Coarse border ware, 'Tudor green' ware, Early Surrey–Hampshire

border whiteware, Early Surrey–Hampshire border redware, Surrey–Hampshire border whiteware, Surrey–Hampshire border ware.

The project enlisted the help of a contemporary potter who tested some of the local clay properties to establish its suitability for throwing and its firing tolerance. Clay from ClayPit Wood was shown to be able to tolerate temperatures high enough to produce stoneware (1240–60 C°). 30 sample sherds from Holling's excavations were submitted to Alan Vince for scientific analysis, and Appendix 1 confirms that during the late 15th and 16th centuries Farnborough potters were selecting different clay for different ranges of forms. From the mid 16th century onwards they were using both red and white-firing clays and possibly mixed clays too.

The descriptions of the site excavations are accompanied by excellent black and white photographs with plans of some kilns and waste dumps. The chronology draws on evidence from Laverstock, Wiltshire, Potterton, Northamptonshire, Barton-on-Humber, Lincolnshire, Denham, Buckinghamshire, Limpsfield, Surrey and Wrenthorpe, Yorkshire, as well as the only archaeo-magnetic date of AD 1560–75 from the excavated kilns. There then follows a section on kiln capacity, loading and firing of the kilns with comparative evidence from other Surrey kilns and also Verwood, Hampshire and the Bickley project in the south-west of England. The discussion of fuel used in medieval kilns is of particular interest. The potters constructed a 'potsherd drain' to help improve drainage and parallels can be found at other production centres (Mayes P and Scott K ed. Johnson S A 1984, Pl IV, B and C).

The vessel forms from the various wares are clearly set out with their decorative features, possible origin of the original form and typologies of vessel types, these are accompanied again by excellent black and white photography and archaeological line drawings. Wherever possible these have been classified with MPRG's 'Guide to the Classification of Medieval Ceramic Forms', but sometimes vessel recording maintains continuity with an earlier study, for example, porringers. These we learn were chiefly used for semi-solid or spoon foods. New forms were however identified, 'baluster cup' is one instance and Chapter six includes a useful summary of dating from consumer sites in London. This is perhaps the first large-scale publication to use MPRG's Classification of Forms and evaluate the classification critically. A great variety of forms are cited, prompted by the needs of the Tudor household, including stove tiles – the site boasts the earliest known production of Rhenish-type ceramic stove-tile in England. Due to the fragmentary nature of many of the vessels it was not possible to measure their capacity. The Surrey–Hampshire border ware industry was also the only supplier of ceramic candlesticks in south-east England and the London area during the 16th and 17th centuries – an innovation that must have

served them well, and these candlesticks also form part of the assemblage at the Inns of Court, London.

Lobed cups were found fired in an unglazed state suggesting that they did undergo two firings and by 15/16th century these glazed cups were produced on site in both late medieval coarseware and transitional fine fabrics. There was no evidence of saggars, which were used to protect forms such as Cistercian types in the north of England, and the only kiln furniture identified were a small collection of ring-props, used as early as 1480s.

Photographic details of manufacturing imperfections are presented and the pattern of glazing discussed along with the use of a binder on coarse border ware, to help the glaze adhere to the body of the vessel. To the reviewer this seems an unnecessary process for the potter to adopt and an added expense.

At the end of 15/early 16th century other Surrey potteries such as Kingston upon Thames and Cheam moved over to making redwares, while the Surrey/Hampshire potters remained making whiteware tableware.

Some vessels made at Farnborough Hill did not travel to London but supplied the local market with containers for agricultural products, as for example tall pots for butter ('butter pots').

The intelligent organisation of line drawings sets out the various pottery groups: tables showing the breakdown of pottery fabrics from the kilns, with bar charts of the breakdown of the main fabrics, the relative proportions of forms, and a piechart of the main functional groups. The most common form recorded is the tripod pipkin, with tubular handle a speciality of Farnborough Hill kilns, while food preparation and serving vessels favour clear glazed whitewares in contrast to the more robust redwares which are better suited for use in the kitchen.

Distribution and marketing are discussed, drawing onevidence from the neighbouring 19th century potters, the role of middleman, merchants, the London market and finally the American connection in Virginia. No mention is made of the other market towns in Surrey, nor the towns upstream along the river Thames which were using Surrey-Hampshire whitewares (Mellor 1997, 33-44).

The origins, influences and development of the border wares are explored through an overview of the Surrey medieval potteries. Little development in styles and technology in coarse border ware was evident over 300 years. Holling dated Kiln 5 to c 1480-1520, and this fits well with evidence from the London sequence, the change in direction of the Farnborough Hill potters took place in a relatively short space of time, with

attention focused on fine tableware. Some adjustment of dating is necessary in London for some vessel types. The changes coincide with changes in other local industries and the importation of drinking jugs made in Raeren stoneware which arrived in London in huge quantities from c. 1480 onwards. The Farnborough potters are seen as good at translating other potteries' vessel forms into their own local idiom, rather than copying direct. A number of line drawings usefully summarise the main Surrey-Hampshire border ware made at Farnborough in the medieval tradition, with parallels amongst the 16th-century London-area redwares, another illustrates Surrey-Hampshire ware forms displaying Rhenish influence and Lower Rhenish white and red earthenware 16th-century parallels to Surrey-Hampshire border wares including a schweinetopf similar to one in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Mellor 1997, Fig. 49, 44).

Despite the considerable achievements of this study much work remains to be tackled, a very recent study of the decoration on border ware (1550-1800) has focused on slipware and its absence from London (May 2008, 5, Fig 26, 34). Neighbouring kiln sites still need to be analysed in detail and the author indicates her wish to test the system of classifying manufacturing faults developed for Farnborough Hill to the large collections of kiln waste: and the reviewer would like to see the methodology applied to the many consumer sites that lie to the west of Farnborough Hill, Surrey.

The end product is an extremely useful characterisation of a major production site in south-east England. The volume is well-produced with excellent illustrative material throughout. A few typographical errors have crept in but do not detract from the discussion and the intelligent use of graphs and line-drawings help to lighten the dense text. A must for any University library with an archaeological department and at the price £19.50 it is affordable by all.

References

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Maureen Mellor