

Alan G Vince PhD FSA

31 March 1952 – 23 February 2009

Many people have been affected by the untimely death from cancer of Alan Vince at the age of 56 and that says much for his influence and popularity, not only within the field of pottery studies, not only within archaeology but in many other places too. It is worth remembering, while looking back on his career, that beyond the confines of our own discipline Alan had friends and relatives who have equal cause to mourn his passing and celebrate his life. Above everything else, Alan was a good man and a true friend. As an archaeologist he was recognised as an innovator in the field of scientific analysis of pottery, a pioneer in the use of computers and the author of many important publications.

Alan was born in Bath and his archaeological career started when he helped out on excavations as a schoolboy. After graduating from the University of Southampton he began his doctoral research and his thesis, completed in 1983, set the pattern for much of his subsequent work. Alan utilised petrological analysis to reveal patterns of manufacture, distribution and supply among the medieval ceramic industries of the Severn Valley. By the time he was awarded his Doctorate he had moved to the Department of Urban Archaeology at the Museum of London, after gaining excavation experience in Gloucester and St. Albans, and was fast establishing a reputation as a specialist in thin-sectioning and fabric analysis. There was, of course, much more to him than that and although he did much to progress the fabric type series created in London by Clive Orton, he also developed pottery recording systems, introduced computerised methods of pottery analysis and oversaw an extensive publication programme. If all that was typical of Alan, so too was the way he brought on members of his team, enabling them to grow as specialists in their own right. I, for one, benefited from his faith in me, as well as his knowledge and generosity and there are many others who owe him a similar debt. By the time he left London in 1988, Alan had a publication list that included important catalogues of pottery from the museum collections, including London ware and Surrey white ware (produced in collaboration with colleagues) and reviews of the ceramic evidence for middle Saxon London.

At Lincoln Alan managed a team that ordered, analysed and published backlog material from over ten years worth of excavation. *A Corpus of Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Pottery from Lincoln*, published in 2006 and co-authored with Jane Young and Victoria Naylor, remains an outstanding example of the success of that programme. A detailed, thorough and well-organised work, it typifies Alan's strengths, not just as a ceramicist but also as a colleague with and for whom it was a pleasure to work. Jane Young recalls that "with the corpus he just sent me away to devise and write it and then offered to do any bits I didn't want to do – a



great way to give me the benefit of his extra knowledge (especially on the petrology) without making me feel I could not do it on my own." Alan's ability to instil confidence in a person by displaying his own trust in their abilities was one of his most valued qualities and he always offered help and support to anybody who needed it. Jane Young again sums it up perfectly: "Everyone here at Lincoln who worked with Alan loved him as he took time to talk with everyone including the lowliest of the digging team (there was always a long queue outside his door) – he had a knack of making everyone feel they were worth something and were capable of more."

The writing of *Pottery in Archaeology* (1993) with Clive Orton and Paul Tyers, was another publication project Alan recalled fondly, as much for the fun of talking it out with his co-authors as for the satisfaction of seeing the publication of the book itself. The length of Alan's bibliography and the consistency of his output is evidence of his professionalism and his belief in making available the results of his labours. The opportunity to move further into the field of publication came in 1995 with an invitation from the University of York to become the first editor of the on-line journal *Internet Archaeology*. This seemed to be a natural way to combine his appetite for publication with his facility with computers and he had a profound influence on a series that continues to thrive. Alan could not desist completely from working with ceramics and too many other archaeologists would not allow him to, so in

1999 he left York to concentrate on the consultancy he had set up back in Lincoln in 1997 and he worked there for the rest of his life. He specialised in scientific techniques, utilising petrology and inductively-coupled plasma analysis to characterise ceramic fabrics from a wide range of periods and places. Alan's expertise will be much missed not only in Britain but also Scandinavia, France and beyond.

Alan combined scientific rigour with intuitive, interpretative flair in a way that allowed him to make sense of hard data whilst also recognising that archaeology is the study of people, with all their (and its) failings and foibles. He tried always to locate his own analysis within the wider contexts of patterns of consumption and social and economic organisation. He possessed a formidable memory, for particular fabrics, even individual thin-sections, for comparable pieces seen in various museum collections and for bibliographic references. He was also happy to share all of his data and his knowledge and expected others to do the same. All of that made him good to work with, as did, importantly, his patience and his sense of humour. Alan was great fun to be with, as many will recall as they look back on the many conferences and other gatherings he attended. He was a regular at MPRG meetings and a ready 'volunteer' when speakers were required; at least, he never let me down during my term as meetings secretary. He never let me down during the twenty-eight year course of our friendship either. His willingness to participate is exemplified by his term as President of the MPRG from 1996 to 1999. He was also Secretary then Vice-President of the Society for Medieval Archaeology.

Alan's rationality became a strength for different reasons following his diagnosis in December 2008. He accepted his impending fate as an unalterable fact. In some ways this made it easy for those around him because talk could be honest and direct but it has not

made the consequences any easier to bear. Alan was never one to bask in his own achievements but when I visited him in the last weeks of his life we looked back fondly on a number of things, especially his work in Scandinavia, his writing, his colleagues and the people he worked with and, of course, his family.

The London ware jug project, which applied cluster analysis to aspects of form and decoration, was also mentioned, for it was then, in 1981 that Alan and I first met. Only two days after that meeting he sent me out to buy twenty pounds of rice to use in measuring the capacities of complete vessels and I never looked back. It was not much later before we found ourselves together in a pub and a pattern had been set. Alan was good in pubs, good with company, as many of the friends he's left behind will testify. One reason for that might be the direct, honest manner coupled with irreverent teasing that characterised his conversation but another must be his self-deprecating modesty. Few of his friends outside archaeology and there are many, knew that he was very highly regarded within the discipline, or that he was a skilled, significant and influential ceramicist. They did not need to know of course but in reading about Alan Vince and celebrating his life, it is important that we recognise not just a fellow archaeologist but also a loyal, honest individual imbued with a well developed sense of his own place in the grand scheme of things. It may not always have been the case that he put others before his devotion to archaeology but he never failed to support those who needed him.

Alan is survived by his wife Joanna, son Leon and daughters Amy and Kate and we should acknowledge, as he was happy to do, that a family is a more satisfying achievement than a thin-section report. The world of archaeology will not be the same now but it has been enriched, like all those who knew him, by the life of Alan Vince.

Duncan H Brown