

medieval ceramics **News**

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Obituaries

Richard Coleman-Smith (1933–2013)

Richard John Chapple Coleman-Smith will be particularly remembered for his part in defining the slip-decorated pottery tradition of Somerset. He developed his skills as a potter and very successful designer of ceramics before turning to education, ending his professional career as Lecturer in Art in Education at the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne. During that time he had trained as a production thrower at Braunton, studied under Kathleen Pleydell-Boverie at Salisbury College of Art and further at North Staffordshire Technical College. This substantial experience and knowledge of pottery, its design and manufacture, he brought to archaeology and was known for his generosity in sharing it with others.

His interest in archaeology was kindled by Harold St George Gray and the lifting of the Low Ham mosaic in 1953 but it did not develop until the 1960s when in 1964 he encouraged pupils from the Archaeology Society of what was then Crewkerne Secondary Modern School to carry out a programme of fieldwalking near Donyatt in Somerset. This led to the discovery of waste from pottery production. Later he collaborated with Colin Platt to publish the superb range of medieval pottery recovered in excavations at Southampton (Platt and Coleman-Smith 1975). It was with the start of a series of excavations in the area south-west of the village of Donyatt in 1968 and the beginning of the partnership with Terry Pearson in 1969 that led to the impressive research programme which culminated in the publication of *Excavations in the Donyatt Potteries* in 1988. This seminal work established the archaeological and historical background to what until then had been regarded as a relatively obscure red earthenware pottery at Horton Cross in the parish of Donyatt near Ilminster. In addition to a comprehensive publication of the excavations, including four kilns ranging from the 13th century to the 18th, and the material recovered, the accompanying pottery catalogue included a corpus of all vessels identified in the County Museum collections and elsewhere that was similar in style. It was this catalogue that firmly defined the Somerset tradition of pottery-making particularly of sgraffito decoration that is quite different from the tradition of North Devon both in style and, as is now known, in technique of manufacture. It is also now confirmed thanks to more fieldwork that production of this type of ware was much more widespread than the Donyatt potteries and that a number of the vessels published were made elsewhere in the region. Two of those production sites were identified by Terry Pearson in 1968 and 1975: Nether Stowey on the flanks of the Quantocks (Coleman-Smith AND Pearson 1970) and Wrangway now under the M5 motorway near the Devon border (awaiting publication). This however does not diminish the achievement of the published corpus in defining



Richard Coleman-Smith showing members of the Bickley Ceramics Project the kiln at site 13, Donyatt, Somerset

a distinctive tradition of pottery-making..

On his retirement to Merriott in Somerset, Richard was able to build on his local research. First he returned to the Donyatt potteries to excavate site 13 following the discovery of another kiln and excavating a second nearby (Coleman-Smith 2002). Second he teamed up with Taft Kaiser and Mike Hughes to identify finds of Somerset wares in the early settlements along the eastern seaboard of North America (Coleman-Smith *et al* 2005). He also retained his interest in experimental pottery firing and provided much support to Oliver Kent and this author in developing our ideas and practice through the Bickley Ceramics Project and in particular the performance of our reconstruction of the 18th-century kiln at Donyatt site 13. He was also a lifelong avid collector of pottery but disposed of much of his collection in 2005.

Richard succumbed to a long debilitating illness and died at the age of 80 early in the morning of 27th November 2013. He will be remembered with great respect and affection especially by the many people whose interest in pottery and archaeology he encouraged.

References

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