

## Helen Walker

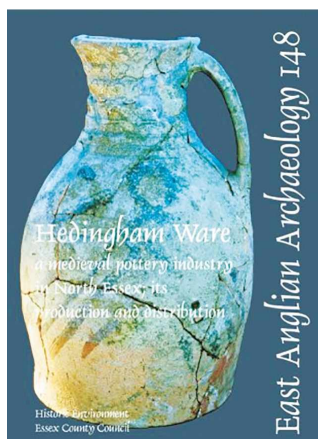
### Heddingham ware: a medieval pottery industry in North Essex; its production and distribution

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Paperback, 200 pages, 48 plates, 48 figs, 18 tables

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This is a detailed and well written account, or perhaps one might say anatomy, of the Heddingham pottery industry of north-central Essex which was in production during the period *c.* AD 1150–1350, or thereabouts. Its *floruit* covered the period *c.* AD 1175–1300. Heddingham is best known for its distinctive fineware jugs decorated with a variety

of coloured slips, applied plastic, stamped and incised decoration. The earlier jugs show influence from early rounded jugs in London-type ware with some jugs also copying London ware Rouen-style jugs of the first half of the 13th century. Then there are fairly certain influences from highly decorated Scarborough ware jugs (and aquamaniles) from Yorkshire, although this never went as far as producing full-blown ‘knight’ jugs or very convincing anthropomorphic jugs in the Scarborough style. Particularly characteristic are the stamped strip jugs of the 13th and early 14th century. The latest jugs show some similarities with Mill Green ware (*c.* AD 1270–1350) from central Essex – the rise of which industry may eventually have helped put Heddingham out of business. These attractive jugs enjoyed a wide regional circulation centred on the northern half of Essex and adjoining southern Cambridgeshire and south-west Suffolk, with a thinner circulation throughout the wider East Anglian region. A few vessels are known from London, and even as far away as Ireland and possibly Norway.

The study focuses on the 14 known production sites clustered around the triangle of land formed by the towns of Sible Heddingham, Gosfield and Halstead (incidentally a very picturesque area), with two outlying kilns further west. Doubtless there are more waiting to be discovered. This was therefore a dispersed industry spread over an area of several square miles of countryside bordering the river Colne and its tributaries. Numerous kilns and other traces of production have been coming to light in this area, in piecemeal fashion, since the 1930’s, including a few set-piece excavations in the 1950’s, 60’s and

70’s. An overview and publication of all this archival information (of considerably varying quality) has long been overdue and the author is to be commended not just for drawing this all together, but also for using this to make useful inter-site comparisons, comparing kiln types and orientation, location, topography, clay and fuel sources, transport routes and modes of connection, to gain insights into the workings of the dispersed potting communities which formed this ceramic tradition. Walker knows this area very well, and its more recent pottery and brickmaking history. I like the fact that, with the help of a local resident, she sought out the location of Bingham’s 19th-century pottery works in Castle Heddingham and the obscure clay source mentioned in Bingham’s notebooks – not shown on any map. I agree with her that there is no substitute for local knowledge!

Chapter 1 sets out the essential data in a gazetteer of production sites and their kiln types. Eight subsequent chapters set out the detailed typologies of fabric, glaze and vessel form, methods of manufacture and an exploration of the origins and affinities of the industry. Chapters 7–9 deal with the distribution of Heddingham ware products (finewares and coarsewares) including gazetteers of their find spots, and of medieval markets and fairs in the region through which pottery was most likely to have been traded; a correlation between wool fairs, established trade routes (including Roman roads) and pottery distribution is highly likely – at least for north Essex and adjoining parts of Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. A slim Chapter 8 (just two pages) considers what little is known of the demise of the industry in the 14th century. The last chapter ‘Conclusions’ (also two pages), distils all the preceding chapters in a coherent way and considers whether the aims and objectives of the Heddingham ware project have been met – Walker considers the outcome to have been reasonably successful and this reviewer wholeheartedly agrees. The lack of good documentary evidence of the period relating to potters and their industry is unfortunate, as Walker acknowledges, but fairly typical of most medieval pottery industries in England. Four appendices deal with petrographic analysis (Patrick Quinn), chemical analysis by ICPS (Mike Hughes), XRF analysis of glazes (Mike Hughes and Duncan Hook) and the extant documentary evidence (Pat Ryan). All of these appendices are interesting in themselves, providing much original data (particularly as regards new fabric definitions and codes), all of which the author uses to underpin numerous observations made throughout the book.

The author and I had overlapping careers in Essex archaeology in the 1980s and this is reflected both in her report (which had its beginnings in that period) and my own publication of the large backlog of medieval pottery from excavations in Colchester (1971–1985) by the Colchester Archaeological Trust (Cotter 2000). Colchester lies some 15 miles (24km) east of Sible Heddingham and the excavations there

produced the largest assemblage of Hedingham finewares (jugs) from any consumer site in the county. No Hedingham coarsewares (cooking pots), however, were identified perhaps, in part, because these cannot easily be distinguished from the local grey cooking pot traditions (a problem which Walker addresses in her report). Up till that point, remarkably little Hedingham fineware had been published. One of the more useful assemblages, from Rivenhall, was published in 1993 (Drury *et al.* 1993), in which the chronology and outside influences of the fineware were outlined.

In the Colchester report I took the opportunity to provide a detailed introduction to the Hedingham ware industry focussing, of course, on the assemblage from Colchester – but having to skirt around the production site evidence, as this was not then fully available (Cotter 2000, 75–91). I was able, however, to widen the subject by plotting the known distribution of the fineware throughout the region. Walker generously acknowledges using my Colchester report as something like a blueprint for her further investigations and updating of what is known of the fineware, its stylistic development, distribution and what this all means. As regards chronology, however, there have been few obvious advances in recent years (the production sites provided very little here too). The fuller and more rigorous distribution maps in Walker's report (of both fine and coarsewares) will provide a useful resource for archaeologists and historians in the region for quite some time.

If there is a slight weakness in the report, then it probably lies in the relatively small number of fineware vessels illustrated, and their rather fragmentary condition (45 fineware vessels illustrated compared to 156 coarseware vessels; compare with 30 fineware illustrations each from Colchester and Rivenhall). These are sufficient to outline the main styles of decoration and typology, and the colour plates are a welcome addition too, but reference to other reports (including Colchester) is often necessary to visualise the full known range of fineware products. This is a typology of the ware excavated from the production sites – and not the consumer sites beyond them. Attempting to republish all the latter was not within the remit of the project. Walker is hardly to blame for this, or for the fact that finewares generally formed only a small proportion of the material excavated from each site, or for the fact that the less glamorous greyware cooking pots *etc* tended to survive much better than the fragile finewares. On the other hand, if coarseware forms are what you are looking for, then Hedingham has plenty to choose from.

Less glamorous they may be, but there is much in the range of coarseware forms and the detailed account of these to interest anyone dealing with excavated pottery in the region, or anyone working on kiln assemblages anywhere. Comparison of the various production site assemblages throws up some interesting observations: the coarseware jugs at one

site, for example, can be distinguished by the method of handle attachment which differs from the other sites. These and other subtle variations point to experimentation within the separate potting villages, and might allow the products of individual kilns to be recognised in the field. Unusual too are a group of wide bowls with at least one pre-firing perforation through the wall, but none complete enough to determine whether this was a pair of holes (for suspension?), or perhaps several widely-spaced holes around the vessel? Their function is unknown, but likely to have been specialised. They remind this reviewer of perforated 'West Country' dishes of the 12th–13th century in south-west England and Wales, at least some of which appear to have had a specialised cooking function. Then there is a magnificent and very large storage jar decorated in the style of late Saxon Thetford ware storage jars with an arrangement of thumbed strips on the body and a thumbed cordon around the rim (Fig. 28.141). A direct connection, however, with the late Saxon Thetford ware industry now seems unlikely. Interesting too is the evidence for the production of chimney pots, but these are rare here (four examples), as they generally are in Essex.

The end of the Hedingham industry, in the 14th century, is rather hazy but was probably not very sudden. It did not quite die out altogether but became subsumed into the ubiquitous Essex sandy orange ware tradition and lost its identity as a distinct industry. Documentary sources show that at least one potter in AD 1351 was diversifying into tile making. Tile making, and later brick making, remained important local industries well into the 19th century, due to the good quality of local clays. Pottery making survived in the outlying village of Wethersfield into the 17th century. Coarse red crockery production returned to Sible Hedingham in the late 18th or early 19th century. In AD 1848 Edward Bingham established his celebrated Castle Hedingham Pottery which produced fancy art pottery as well as plainer wares until AD 1901.

Essex is one of the most prolifically ceramic counties in south-east England (as my own experience there showed me), with more known kilns and production sites than almost any other county in the region. Walker, and her recent predecessors in the field, had the insight to see this concentration of kiln sites and other clues, in this one part of north Essex, as a single ceramic tradition, and not just as a scatter of isolated find spots and Historic Environment Records (HERs). Recognising and defining this takes detailed local knowledge. Here then is the bigger picture laid bare and set out in orderly fashion, with few stones left unturned. There is always room for a bit more fine-tuning – more dating evidence for one thing – but one suspects that this will be the last word on the Hedingham industry for a long time to come.

*John Cotter* (Oxford Archaeology)

## References

- Cotter, J. P., 2000 *Post-Roman pottery from excavations in Colchester 1971–1985*, Colchester Archaeological Report 7. (Also online at: <http://cat.essex.ac.uk/summaries/CAR-0007.html>).
- Drury, P. J. with contributions by Cunningham, C. M., Kilmurry, K. and Walker, J. S. F., 1993 'The later Saxon, medieval and post-medieval pottery' in W. Rodwell and K. Rodwell, (eds) *Rivenhall: Investigations of a Roman Villa, Church and Village, 1950–77*. CBA Res Rep 80, 78–95.

## Philippe Husi, sous la direction de

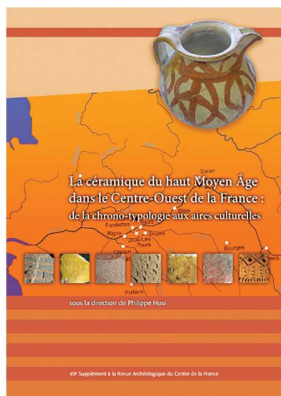
## La céramique du haut Moyen Âge dans le Centre-Ouest de la France: de la chrono-typologie aux aires culturelles

2013, 49<sup>th</sup> Supplement to the Revue Archéologique du Centre de la France

283 pages, 87 figures, 67 plates of drawings

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It is always a pleasure to encounter a new pottery publication from France. Apart from the opportunity to learn more about French ceramics, the production standards are always high, illustrations are usually plentiful and informative and the subject is covered thoroughly and with clarity. This latest offering from Tours is no exception and

what is more, it examines a part of France we do not often look at too closely from Britain. A handy map in the introduction shows what that area is; principally the region around Tours in the Loire Valley, taking in Jublains to the north, Poitiers to the south, travelling westwards from Nevers to Tours, via Orléans and Blois. The introduction also sets out the thematic scope of the text, while also providing a useful breakdown of what to find on the accompanying DVD (a staggering array of photographs of sherds and fabrics, with attendant drawings, tables and descriptive text).

The book itself is divided into three sections. The first is an introduction to the methodology and the extent of the study. Pottery from a total of 27 sites in 14 different towns or cities is represented, covering two ceramic periods; the 6th to 7th centuries and the 8th to early 11th. A grand total of 8,036 individual vessels (not all complete, of course) constitute the size of the pottery assemblage, which does not seem that

much but, considering the geographical extent of the project, is probably more than enough. Sub-sections cover the methods of form and fabric analysis and quantification, as well as discussing the issues around bringing together assemblages from such a dispersed group of sites. Section 2 comprises the biggest part of the book. It includes descriptions of the products from each area; La Touraine, Le Blésois, Saran et Orléans, le Berry et la Nièvre, le Haut-Poitou, aux Marches, La Mayenne et le Limousin. These sub-sections are authored by a range of contributors, too numerous to mention here but adding up to an exhaustive survey and analysis. The study of ceramics, perhaps all archaeology, is the search for similarities and differences and what they might signify, and this work admirably expresses and facilitates such an exercise. The section on La Touraine, for example, includes a number of sub-sections: context and the corpus of study; a chrono-typological synthesis for the 5th and 6th centuries (which includes detailed descriptions of form, decoration *etc*); typological development; conclusions; all supported by drawings and tables. These sub-sections are repeated for the different sites in La Touraine: Tours, Joué-lès-Tours, Fondettes, Neuvy-Le-Roi et Truyes. The approach is logical, clear and consistent, and the result is a very fine piece of work. Many of the pots have a sub-Romano-Gallic appearance, with ovoid or rounded jars a prominent form. Rouletted decoration also appears to be common and painted red slip makes an appearance in the ninth or tenth centuries. This should be of interest to anyone attempting to follow the development of jar forms in early medieval Western Europe. The whiteware products of Stamford, for instance, seem to owe a good deal to their French counterparts and studies such as this one serve to broaden one's perspective on a long and extensive tradition. The same applies to the spouted pitchers that also make an appearance here, versions of which can be seen among mid Saxon assemblages in England. Other forms, less familiar perhaps at this date within these shores, are costrels, small bowls and decorated mortars (characteristic of Jublains, where, later on, they developed into truly extravagant vessels).

Section 3 brings the descriptive content of Section 2 together in a discussion of the value of this evidence in elucidating socio-economic and cultural mechanisms. This commences with a consideration, by Sébastien Jesset, of traditions of decoration, broken down according to decorative technique, such as relief or incised, and also includes glaze (which was introduced in the tenth or eleventh centuries). The conclusion seems to be that in the north of the study area, influence from still further north may be detected, while elsewhere a more specific regional identity can be discerned. Philippe Husi then contributes a discussion of pottery and cultural areas in the centre-west of France, which brings everything together in a marvellously assured consideration of all the evidence.