

# medieval ceramics **Papers**

# The 21st (probably) Gerald Dunning Memorial Lecture, Taunton, June 2016

## Are We Nearly There Yet?

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### Introduction

Early in 2008, a while after a Medieval Pottery Research Group meeting, which I had attended as Meetings Secretary, I received a telephone call from our outgoing President, Victoria Bryant. “Good news”, she said. “We’ve found someone to take over as President”. “Marvellous,” I replied, “Who is it”? “You”. I must admit that at that moment, as my mind searched fruitlessly for an excuse politely to decline, the least of my concerns was that one day I would have to give the Gerald Dunning Memorial Lecture, but having completed two terms in 2014, here I am. When I finally received the invitation to discharge this by no means insignificant duty, I found myself wondering what I might talk about; the main problem being that I’ve covered most of my areas of interest and/or expertise in previous lectures and for once I was hoping to avoid repeating myself. My first thought was to go back to previous Dunning lectures in search of a theme; perhaps something that could do with an update, or something altogether novel. That, unfortunately, induced further self-doubt as I contemplated the illustrious company I now found myself amidst.

What this exercise did do however, was throw up a numbering anomaly. According to my reckoning, which is based on conference programmes and published texts in *Medieval Ceramics*, the lecture given by my predecessor at the Perth conference in 2010 was number eighteen in the sequence, but for some reason it appears as number 26 in the journal (Bryant 2011). Since 2010 there have been two further Dunning lectures, in Douglas and Lisbon. Several of the lectures have not been published, while confusingly the one printed in *Medieval Ceramics* 21 is identified as the twelfth Dunning lecture on the contents page but given as number thirteen on the first page of the actual text of the paper (Whitehouse

1997, 3). Table 1 lists all the Dunning lectures, with the likely true number and in some instances, in brackets, their published number. The Group has not had a Gerald Dunning Memorial Lecture every year since its introduction in 1982 because they are given only at three-day conferences and all the meetings on years with even numbers between 1990 and 1998 were one-day events. The conference in 1999 was held in Sheffield in partnership with the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group, and apparently no Dunning lecture was included in the programme. From the year 2000 onwards the MPRG has held its three-day conference on years of an even number, with one-day events in between. It seems, therefore, that at the Taunton meeting in 2016, I gave the 21st Gerald Dunning Memorial Lecture. If this is true, then twenty-one seems to be a good age to be reflective, forward-looking and perhaps even celebratory. Besides, one approach to this sort of lecture is to talk about whatever one is working on currently, and although I have not been looking at much pottery recently, I have been involved in the production of *A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology* (PCRG, SGRP, MPRG 2016), and it seems opportune to consider how we got to this point, why we needed to produce this document and what else there might be still to do.

The first task is to credit the three study groups for coming together to produce such a significant document, as well as my co-authors, Alistair Barclay, Paul Booth, Jane Evans, David Knight and Imogen Wood, Derek Hall, who managed the project and Rosy Szymanski, who represented the funders, Historic England. With the *Standard*, our intention, of course, is to address issues of inconsistency in the ways pottery had been characterised, analysed and reported on. There is much variability in the quality of pottery work, which some people ascribe to corner-cutting resulting from the low costs endemic in commercial archaeology and developer-led, competitively tendered

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**Table 1.** A list of the Gerald Dunning Memorial lectures, identifying the speakers, the years they were given (not published) and the relevant editions of Medieval Ceramics (MC). Published numbers, where they vary from this sequence, are given in brackets.

No.	Year	Speaker / Location	Title	Published
1	1982	John Hurst Oxford	Gerald Dunning and his contribution to Medieval Archaeology	MC 6
2	1983	Frans Verhaeghe Aberdeen	Low Countries Medieval Pottery Imported into Scotland: notes on a minor trade	MC 7
3	1984	WA Van Es, AC Bardet, WJH Verwers Bergen op Zoom	Three Aspects of the Wheel-turned Pottery of Dorestad: a synopsis	MC 8
4	1985	John Cherry London	Sex, Magic and Gerald Dunning	MC 9
5	1986	Jean Le Patourel York	Potters and Pots	MC 10
6	1987	John Lewis Belfast	Roof Tiles: some observations and questions	MC 11
7	1988	Bob Thomson Southampton	Thoughts on the Sgraffito Tradition	Unpublished
8	1989	Peter Brears Stoke-on-Trent	The Continuing Tradition	MC 13
9	1991	Tarq Hoekstra Knuston Hall	Knuston Hall to Knuston Hall – Sixteen Years of Pottery Studies in the Low Countries	MC 15
10	1993	Hugo Blake Southampton	No Sex, Some H-M and Lots of Fine Trade: medieval ceramic studies in Italy	MC 17
11	1995	Alan Vince Cologne	The Trade in medieval pottery around the North Sea	MC 19
12 (13)	1997	David Whitehouse Worcester	Islamic Pottery and Christian Europe from the 10 <sup>th</sup> – 15 <sup>th</sup> Century	MC 21
13	2000	David Barker Oxford	25 years of post-medieval pottery	Unpublished
14	2002	Claire McCutcheon Dublin	Medieval pottery in Ireland	Unpublished
15	2004	Ken Barton Winchester	Saintonge Polychrome Pottery and its implications	Unpublished
16	2006	Maureen Mellor Chester	Crossing cultures and bridging boundaries from the 9th to 12th centuries	Unpublished
17	2008	Graziella Berti Siena	The productions of glazed pottery in Tuscany (13th–15th centuries). The transmission of technical knowledge from al-Andalus to Pisa for producing “maioliche arcaiche	Unpublished
18 (26)	2010	Victoria Bryant Perth	The Mystery of the Missing Miskins	MC 32
19 (27)	2012	Peter Davey Douglas	The Isle of Man: central or marginal in the ceramic history of these islands? A case study	MC 34
20	2014	Rosa Varela Gomes Lisbon	Medieval and later ceramic research in Western Iberia	Unpublished

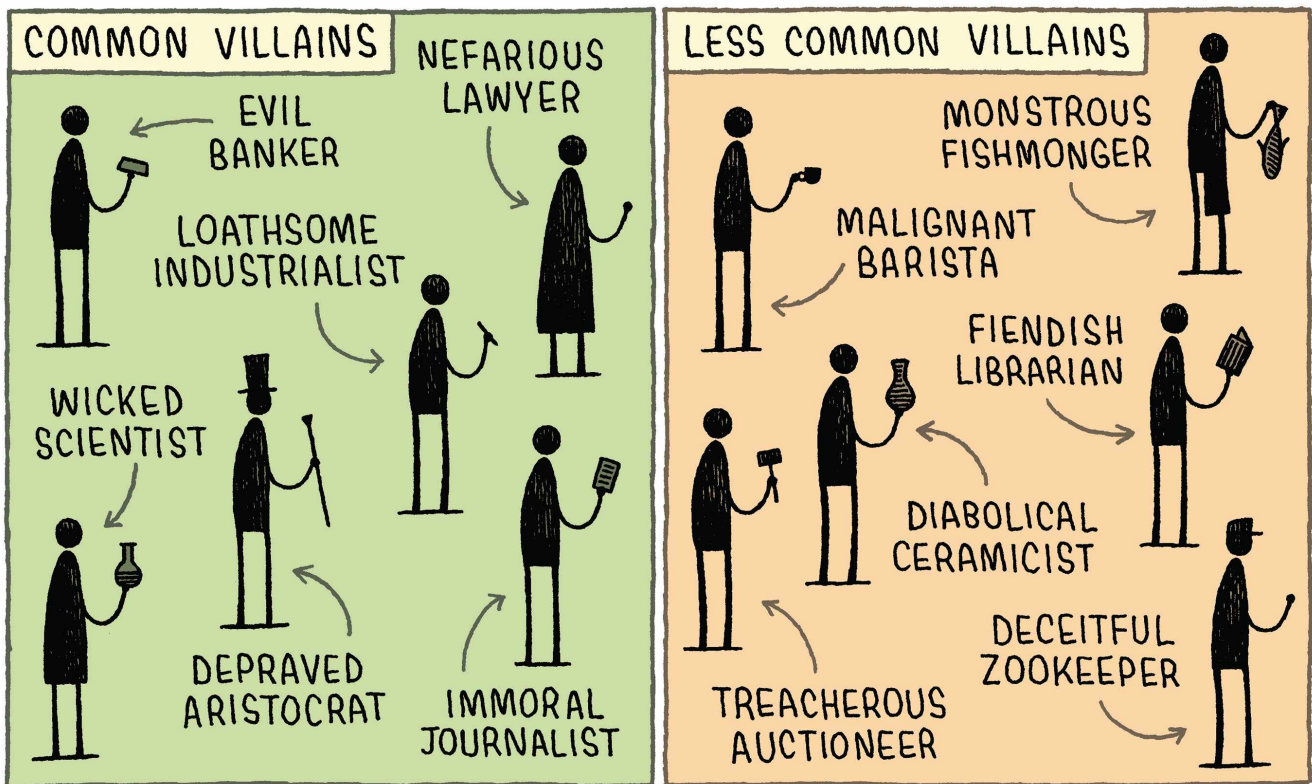


Figure 1. 'Common Villains and Less Common Villains'.  
Image: Tom Gauld (www.tomgauld.com; Reproduced by kind permission)

projects (eg Blinkhorn 2014). On the 21st May 2016, *The Guardian* newspaper published a cartoon by the wonderful Tom Gauld, in which common villains were compared with less common villains (Fig 1). Among the latter is the dread figure of the 'Diabolical Ceramicist', who strikes a chord in several ways (in the company of those other insidious threats, the Fiendish Librarian and Treacherous Auctioneer). Of course, as well as devilish, diabolical these days can also mean 'hopelessly bad', or 'criminally unskilled' and although diabolical ceramicists are uncommon villains, where they do occur they can frequently find themselves in the company of unhelpful diggers, ignorant project managers and under-resourced development control archaeologists. The *Standard* is intended to assist all of those people, of course, as well as ourselves, exemplary as we are. Even so, it is interesting, now and again, to consider how we achieved an understanding of what is required to make proper sense of pottery assemblages.

### The development of pottery studies

A good starting point, as ever, is with Dunning himself. One of his most renowned pieces of work is his examination of the trade in medieval pottery around the North Sea (Dunning 1968), where he sets out the following basis for his work:

In order that pottery may be used to demonstrate medieval trade, it is necessary that the material should fulfil three premises:

- 1) The pottery must be distinctive in style of decoration and in ware.
- 2) It must be readily distinguishable from the pottery of the country to which it was sent.
- 3) The sources of the pottery must be known or definable within limits (Dunning 1968, 35).

The attributes of distinctiveness and origin could be readily applied to any search for patterns within, or between, pottery assemblages, and that search could be extended beyond trade and exchange, to include methods of manufacture, technology, use and disposal. Such an approach recognises that the fundamental purpose of recording pottery to a consistent standard, and analysing it within a commonly constructed framework, is to facilitate comparative studies and enable the progress of research. This may seem basic and straightforward to us now but it was a necessary statement to make in 1968, and it is worth considering why that was.

The beginning of the 20th century seems as good a starting point as any, if only because 1903 saw the publication of Hobson's British Museum catalogue (Hobson 1903). Medieval pottery does not occupy too many pages of Hobson's volume but entries are accompanied by monochrome photographs of individual vessels and there are attempts to note parallels in form and style. Overall, however, Hobson is dismissive of the quality of medieval pottery and its potential to inform serious studies of the past:

Up to [1850] the interest is well sustained by the upward progress of English pottery from a condition of almost barbarous rudeness to a definite and distinctive position, commanding the homage of the civilised world. ... In mediæval times the potter received, and perhaps deserved, little or no encouragement. His wares were of the commonest description; the materials were coarse and gritty, unrefined and ill-baked; the glaze was sometimes altogether wanting, often only applied in sufficient quantity to render the vessel impervious, rarely enriching the entire surface ...; washes and slips ... and rude ornament either applied or incised, completed the scheme of decoration. Under such circumstances his productions would be in little demand outside his own class (Hobson 1903, xv-xvi).

It is not yet possible to assign dates in a collection of mediæval pottery, partly from the great scarcity of evidence, documentary or otherwise, on the progress of the art from the eleventh to the seventeenth century, and partly from the rudeness and want of character of the objects themselves ... (Hobson 1903, 52).

We are a long way, here, from meeting Dunning's requirements for establishing patterns of pottery manufacture, movement and use and it is to Dunning, again, that we must turn to detect any progress away from that somewhat art historical perspective. After early work on prehistoric and Romano-British sites and assemblages, Dunning seems to have become closely involved with medieval pottery in 1931, when he commenced his seminal inventory of Saintonge polychrome (Dunning 1933). Ahead of his time, he rapidly established himself as the leading scholar for medieval pottery in Britain. In 1935 he published an examination of pottery from Chicksands (Dunning 1935), that includes serious consideration of the coarsewares and local sandy jugs and includes descriptions of fabrics and forms, together with discussion of parallels and drawings of specific rim forms. By 1940 he had developed his understanding sufficiently to express these thoughts:

The status of the medieval potter should be considered in any appreciation of his wares. He was a craftsman without a guild, and so the industry was largely without organization or cohesion. In consequence, although a general similarity is evident in pottery from different regions of England, it has a strong local and traditional character which gives it at once the charm of a peasant art, but is the despair of the archaeologist with his concern for typology (Dunning 1940, 212).

Even Dunning, therefore, pondered the fruitlessness of trying rigorously to analyse and classify medieval pottery, but one of the great things about him was that, because his interests extended over a huge area,

he applied the same approach and level of insight to every problem. In Dover, in a brief report on a group from a garderobe at Snargate Street, he sought to find influences on Kentish pottery that illustrated a network of contacts which might inform our understanding of ceramic regionality:

... a specific relationship exists between certain jugs of redware found in East Kent and finds made in East Anglia, centering on Cambridge. ... Study of all the material has enabled the Dover jugs to be placed in a wide context of coastal trade, but has not defined their date any closer than as required by the associations of the site, and on typological grounds (Rix and Dunning 1955, 143).

Martyn Jope followed a similar line in a piece of work that used distribution maps to explore the phenomenon of regional variation in greater detail:

In the eleventh and twelfth (and even thirteenth) centuries some hand-made coarse pottery was still being made in many parts of England in and around the villages for local use, a peasant craft. Though simple, a few particular shapes have regional or specific distributions, as also have some nuances of detail in construction of the pots of shapes general throughout much of Britain. If we construct such maps we must be prepared to ask (and, if possible, answer) what such distributions could mean in terms of the life of medieval communities (Jope 1963, 328).

At the same time, Jope was rightly cautious over the validity of distribution maps:

Such distribution patterns will inevitably cover three, four or more generations in time, and be more diffused than their first generation pattern, though this may be occasionally inferred from the rather restricted distribution of some specific feature (Jope 1963, 329).

One thing is at least clear, integrated regional cultures do not seem to emerge crisply from medieval pottery distributions (Jope 1963, 349).

We might today claim that Jope was working with far too wide a study area, but what his maps show now, as distribution maps always have, is the pattern of archaeological work and the quantity, or paucity, of the available evidence. Jope held onto the established opinion that medieval pottery was largely a peasant product, to the extent that he placed the use of pottery within the 'rural' classes, at least until the emergence of the 'middle class' in the late fifteenth century. He also acknowledged that the mechanisms for distributing pottery became embedded in trading patterns developed by the middle class, by which

presumably he meant the merchant class. Jope, just like Dunning, sought to understand the ways in which regional styles developed in response to influences from elsewhere, as well as being affected by local environmental and social conditions. This approach now seems firmly culture historical, promoting a diffusionist theory of change and progress, to the extent that there is, for us more enlightened students of the past (!), insufficient recognition of the degree of choice that medieval potters might have had, or indeed not, and the multiplicity of forces that every one of us labours under. Earlier interpretations may result from a general acceptance of pottery as a low-class material, which itself may have been symptomatic of a general dismissal of medieval archaeology in its entirety, and in pottery studies particularly, despite the ground-breaking work of Dunning, Jope and others. As late even as 1974, Henry Hodges could sum up the prevailing attitude towards medieval pottery, somewhat discourteously, in his paper in the Gerald Dunning tribute volume:

Made by peasants and for the use of peasants ... Our ever-increasing understanding of the European ceramic traditions and the often embarrassingly large quantity of pottery recovered from excavations should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the medieval potter was, in the eyes of his contemporaries, a lowly being, and his products of no great account (Hodges 1974, 38).

Hodges did not see any contradiction between his recognition of those 'embarrassingly large quantities' and his belief that this material was 'of no great account'. Today, surely we would acknowledge large assemblages as a positive boon, and understand that pottery usage permeated every level of medieval society, which is why we find so much of it, everywhere. Our aim now must be to reveal just what pottery did mean to different people in the medieval period.

Two years later David Peacock published his scheme for describing ceramic fabrics and in so doing, brought us fully to the point where it was possible to talk definitively about Dunning's premise of distinctiveness (Peacock 1977, 30). It had now become clear that fabric, the character of the clay body and any inclusions within it, held more information about the distinctive nature of a pot than many aspects of form or typology and it is from there that ceramic studies have progressed from Peacock's somewhat resigned statement made in the same publication:

Chronology is worth stressing for it has been a dominant feature of both Roman and Medieval ceramic archaeology. However, regrettably it has been so emphasized that other aspects have been seriously neglected. In particular, the use of pottery as a tool for studying early economics

and commerce has been sadly ignored, with a few notable exceptions (Peacock 1977, 23).

The nature of pottery reports have remained virtually static for many years and tied largely to the sole objective of providing for the needs of site chronology (Peacock 1977, 26).

Peacock may not have acknowledged it, but in his important paper he echoed and developed Dunning's criteria:

The pottery report should surely contain three types of record.

1. A complete *quantitative* record of the types of pottery present in every layer, phase or period of the site.
2. Drawings to illustrate the forms present.
3. Accurate unambiguous descriptions of the fabric categories to which the vessels are attributed. (Peacock 1977, 27)

By 1983 these ideas had been widely espoused, to the extent that it became essential to produce guidelines for the recording and reporting on pottery. A comprehensive attitude towards the value of pottery had been accepted and was set out by two leading lights of the MPRG:

Pottery has an immediate function as a diagnostic and dating agent on archaeological sites, and ultimately as evidence of past technological, cultural and economic conditions and of their development (Blake and Davey 1983, 6).

Since then, we could add more significant contributors to the cause, such as John Hurst, Ken Barton, Clive Orton and Alan Vince, to name but a few. Having reached that point it seems odd that there is growing concern over the quality of ceramic analysis and the ways pottery is understood to contribute to archaeological interpretations, especially in the context of fieldwork projects. The new *Standard* may represent an inevitable progression from 1983 but there remains concern that the message has been, if not altogether lost, then perhaps mislaid, because it is still necessary to reiterate the value of pottery studies to archaeology:

The interpretation of pottery ... will lead to an understanding of the progress of technology, methods and patterns of distribution, modes of consumption and processes of deposition. Those conclusions will go on to inform an understanding of the people who occupied a site, including their social, economic and cultural circumstances and the ways in which they interacted with material culture, as well as the chronology of activities

represented by the surviving evidence (PCRG, SGRP, MPRG 2016, 1).

## Pottery in popular texts

Alongside the development of academic thought it is interesting also to look at how medieval pottery has been characterised in publications intended to have more popular appeal. We can, again, start at the beginning of the 20th century, with what is effectively a guide for collectors:

Remembering too, how, at a later period ... the Romans spread the knowledge of pottery-making in certain forms over the greater part of Western Europe, England must have been, in times still remote, a pottery-producing centre of importance ... though all this was to vanish in the ruder times of the Saxon, Dane and Northman, when the country lapsed once more into primitive barbarism. It is difficult to believe that the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which witnessed such a revival of other crafts, could have left that of the potter untouched; yet there is little direct evidence of the production of any particular form of pottery of the slightest artistic account among us ... we are driven to the conclusion that down to the late sixteenth, or early seventeenth century, very little pottery was made in England that was above the level of skill of the travelling brick-maker or tile-burner. The workmen connected with the religious houses, who produced the tile pavements, must have brought to the production of such earthenware vessels as they made, a much higher technical skill and better taste than these untutored peasants. Indeed, the better made wares for which the name 'Cistercian' has been proposed seem to show that that order, at all events, turned to account, in the manufacture of earthenware vessels for ordinary use, the knowledge and skill gained in the manufacture of their elaborate tiled floors. Be this as it may, it is impossible to resist the feeling that we are still in the province of the archaeologist, not of the pottery collector ... (Burton 1904, 1–2)

... peasant pottery – made by peasants, for peasants ... in which the materials, the methods, and the artistic skill displayed were still of the simplest order ... (Burton 1904, 4)

... throughout the Middle Ages, so far as we can judge by authentic examples, the pottery made in England was, broadly speaking, only such as would be used by the lower orders ... It is not until Tudor times that we find anything like refinement of form or decorative skill ... and, even then, the known pieces are too few to build any theory upon that would connect them with any definite place of origin or with any potter whose name has by

chance survived (Burton 1904, 20).

This sets out what was already a long-standing trope, which is proving difficult to redress. Here, the medieval period is portrayed as a long slog out of the 'barbarism' into which England had descended after the civilized zenith achieved by those cultured Romans. Medieval pottery, furthermore, had no merit whatsoever, although the Cistercians received special mention for their skill and knowledge (of course, it is now nonsensical to suggest that Cistercian monks themselves actually produced pottery, or for that matter tiles). Worse still, medieval pottery is good only for archaeologists, to whom is left the task of working out a way of establishing places of origin and date. Although the question that is inferred is 'why bother?', because Burton precedes (if not inspires) Hodges in characterising this as peasant pottery, used only by the 'lower orders', which is where, one presumes, archaeologists belong.

In 1948 Bernard Rackham dissented from this view in his contribution to the Faber monograph series on pottery and porcelain:

... these products of what may rightly be called a bygone manufacture ... are pleasing to look at without exception; though designed for severely practical purposes and making no conscious claims to be regarded as things for aesthetic estimation, they have a dignity and beauty of form which are as a rule painfully lacking in the civilised teapots and covered dishes, gleaming white, smooth and gaudy, in our china shops (Rackham 1948, 1).

His enthusiasm seems to have proved far from infectious, however, for popular commentators, even twenty years later, continued to represent the Romans as more civilized and thus superior to their successors, which naturally meant that, by extension, their pottery was also of higher quality. Ceramic vessels in the medieval period were thus suitable only for poor people:

The Romans lived in Britain for nearly 400 years, building roads and towns and bringing civilization to the land ... The influence of the Romans was soon forgotten and it was not until the thirteenth century that pottery was made on any scale ... At this time only the poor ate from pottery ... so what little decoration there is on pottery is usually of a very simple nature ... (Dadd and Rogers, 1967, 33).

These misconceptions (at least to archaeologists) were still being trotted out nearly thirty years after that:

Soon after the Romans abandoned Britain in the early part of the fifth century, their highly organized industry began to disintegrate. Populations were dispersed and the economy collapsed as England

began its slide into the anarchy of the Dark Ages, constantly being invaded and pillaged by the Saxons (Clark 1995, 11).

... British Medieval pottery remained a backward craft compared to that of Europe. No technological advances of consequence can be ascribed to the British potter until the eighteenth century. The introduction of lead glazing, wheels, updraft kilns and other equipment and techniques were all either borrowed from other craftsmen or else introduced by immigrant potters long after their application in Europe ... Nor did potters build shelters around their kilns to allow them to fire in inclement weather as the Europeans did. This meant that productivity was tied to the caprices of the weather ... This technical stasis was tied to the potter's low social status which denied him the capital, education and quite probably the optimism of spirit required to improve his craft (Clark 1995, 12).

The pitcher was the only piece of British pottery that was likely to be found on the table and then only in the less wealthy homes. Pottery of the Medieval (*sic*) period is almost totally defined by utility. Changes in form and shape were rooted in the consequence of daily use ... The artistry of the medieval potter blossomed briefly in the Midlands during the mid-thirteenth century. Until this point ceramics had not exhibited any aesthetic or decorative ambition. From 1250 onwards some jugs were decorated with complex patterns ... then, around 1350, as abruptly as it had arrived, the style vanished (Clark 1995, 15–16).

The overall message here seems to be that after 410, England descended into barbarism and even after we were saved by the Normans, potters remained unskilled plagiarists, while their products lacked refinement because they were 'defined by utility'. Even now, the same misapprehensions are perpetuated and due to the all-pervading reach of the world-wide web, will be even more difficult to break down. This is from the website of JoAnn Turner, an artist, scholar and writer based in British Columbia:

When the Angles and Saxons left the Continent and moved into Britain, they generally left all of their best potters behind. Potters on the Continent were far superior to potters in Britain for several centuries. While Anglo-Saxon potters in Europe were using a fast wheel (what we would call a potter's wheel), English potters were still pinching pots or making them from coils, and possibly using a slow wheel only for decorating them.

There's not a lot of information in popular historical accounts or art history about pottery as an art form or as something people cared about, but there is a

great deal known about pottery styles and types... But very often, little attention is given to pottery as an expression of its time or culture.

In most of Europe from the invention of pottery into the early Middle Ages, pottery was considered utilitarian and nothing more ... The one thing pottery was used for was jugs, because wine and beer don't taste very good stored in metal.

Some medieval pottery is downright ugly, partly because the glaze technology was not very good but partly because the clay wasn't good enough to hold a shape, or the potters had no models to work from to show them how to make a beautiful pot that is both elegant and strong.

This was not high art. It wasn't destined to grace the tables of nobility. This was destined for the kitchens and pantries of people in the village or the manor where the potter worked (Turner 2016).

The proposition that Saxon pottery was badly made because the incomers left all their best potters at home is debatable, to say the least, but worse, surely, is the view that 'little attention is given to pottery as an expression of its time or culture'. Pick up any copy of *Medieval Ceramics* to find that the opposite is the case. It may be true that pottery was seldom present on the tables of the very wealthy or the elite, at least on public occasions, but those people would have seen it all around them, and whatever it meant, either functionally or symbolically, would have been understood across a society that was deeply hierarchical. The very fact that it was a common denominator led to its ubiquity, and that is what lends pottery its value to archaeology and the study of the past. If that is not understood by those working with, or inspired by, medieval ceramics then perhaps that is because our discipline is failing to transmit a more informed and enlightened view (although it remains true that one can take a horse to water but it still has to want to drink). Somewhat unexpectedly, perhaps, it is the popular information outlet Wikipedia that gives current views greater expression, describing how pottery can contribute to an understanding of economic and cultural contexts:

The study of pottery can help to provide an insight into past cultures. Pottery is durable, and fragments, at least, often survive long after artefacts made from less-durable materials have decayed past recognition. Combined with other evidence, the study of pottery artefacts is helpful in the development of theories on the organisation, economic condition and the cultural development of the societies that produced or acquired pottery. The study of pottery may also allow inferences to be drawn about a culture's daily life, religion,



social relationships, attitudes towards neighbours, attitudes to their own world and even the way the culture understood the universe (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pottery#Archaeology>).

Rarely however, is it possible to find echoes of Bernard Rackham’s appreciation of medieval pots as objects of beauty in their own right. I side with him though, and perhaps one thing the MPRG could do is publicly celebrate the simple loveliness of the objects themselves.

### Meeting standards

If Wikipedia can express so succinctly the principles of our discipline, why do archaeologists themselves sometimes fail to recognise them? The following is an entire pottery report retrieved from the library of unpublished fieldwork reports hosted by the Archaeology Data Service (tell-tale ware types and the name of the town have been removed):

A single abraded sherd of Late Iron Age-Romano British XX Ware was found in Context 1.

Over 30 sherds of Medieval pottery dating from the 14th to early 15th century were found in all of the soil contexts. These have come from a variety of sources, including the XX kilns, XX XX ware, and Saintonge. Two sherds of 14th century pottery, including one from a green-glazed jug with a raised circular motif decoration, found in the wall structure are probably from the XX kilns.

The largest group of pottery dates from the mid 15th to mid 16th (*sic*) century, and derived mostly from Context 2. It comprises predominantly hard-fired sandy earthenware products from the late XX kilns, together with a number of Raeren and Siegburg stonewares, and Dutch red ware.

The pottery from the 16th and 17th centuries is represented by some tin-glazed earthenwares, local earthenwares, and a single Borderware sherd, whilst from the 18th and 19th centuries there were numerous Creamware, porcelain, transfer-printed china and pearlware sherds, together with some brown-glazed earthenware sherds.

The Medieval and Post Medieval pottery assemblages appear to be typical of those normally found in XX (<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/greylit>).

Written in 2005, it is a description of the pottery recovered during a watching brief in a coastal town. It is not necessarily a bad report but there is no adequate quantification, so although Dunning’s criteria of distinctiveness and definability have been addressed, the exercise is wholly descriptive. Even then some of the descriptions are lacking. What variety of Saintonge is present? Is it 14th or 15th century in date? If so, that would be of some interest as most finds for Saintonge pottery are of the 13th century types. The accompanying table (Fig 2) is no more helpful, as it is not possible to establish which sherds occur where in the stratigraphy. It may ‘only’ be a watching brief

**Table 1 The Finds**

Context Number	Pottery No./gms.	Animal bone No./gms.	Glass No./gms.	Other No./gms.
1	48 Post Medieval 7 Medieval 1 xxxxxxxxx Ware (473)	6 bone (68) 12 scallop shells (16)	4 (24) 1 ink bottle (60)	28 clay pipe (64) 1 metal spoon (24) 2 tile/brick frags (46) 4 metal frags (22) 1 QEII 1955 half crown
2	14 Post Medieval 24 Medieval 60 Later Medieval (697)	30 bone (330) 2 oyster shells (40)		4 clay pipe (6) 43 tile/brick frags (662) 3 slate frags (10)
3	7 Post Medieval 8 Medieval 2 Later Medieval (141)	4 bone (86)		1 slate frag (1) 1 tile frag (52)
4	2 Medieval (8)			2 brick/tile frags (60) 1 slate frag (4)

**Figure 2.** The finds table included in a report on a watching brief completed in 2005

but this information must have been known, so why is it not made available? After all, project site reports invariably include exhaustive descriptions of mud (otherwise known as the structural evidence) but very rarely of the finds. As the *Standard* sets out, the basic approach must be to characterise and quantify. Having done so, it is then possible to progress to interpretations of multiple aspects of past societies:

The interpretation of pottery is based on a detailed characterisation of the types present, supported by rigorous quantification and consistent approaches to analysis that facilitate comparison between assemblages (PCR, SGRP, MPRG 2016, 1).

Hereby it seems we have achieved the means of fulfilling Dunning's three requirements. We can distinguish wares (and fabrics) in greater detail than ever before; we can describe them stylistically and, with the use of the Classification of Medieval Pottery Forms (MPRG 1998), do so consistently; we can characterise the material from which they were fashioned, to the point where sources can be differentiated in very precise detail. Following Peacock's lead, we are also able to add a fourth premise to Dunning's three; that pottery types must be quantified by context. It is context that is vital and the relative proportions of pottery types must be understood in order to inform interpretations of distribution, use and disposal.

## Conclusion

The question remains: are we nearly there yet? It is to be hoped that, if the discipline continues to develop, we will never be there, but it is now possible to add further criteria that could move us along, including the following:

- 1) Promote a common understanding of the value of pottery for interpreting archaeological sites (i.e. the activities of humans in the past)
- 2) Educate people to recognise the information inherent in archaeological ceramics and the potential and limitations of pottery studies
- 3) Agitate for application of the *Standard* universally and consistently
- 4) Achieve a common desire to report on pottery assemblages to the highest reasonable standard
- 5) Publication should no longer be solely about the report, so it is, therefore, necessary to make data generally available through digital archive repositories
- 6) Develop the MPRG website to celebrate pots as lovely things in their own right and to promote the value of pottery studies, thus informing popular histories of pottery, and public understanding in general. It should be made easier for bloggers and website authors to locate accurate information.

In other words we need to build further on the work of Dunning and his successors and eradicate forever the malign entity that is the diabolical ceramicist. The MPRG is a vehicle for sharing knowledge, understanding and experience and, as I hope I have shown, to that end there is something to be gained from looking back, even as we look forward. It is instructive to provide context by referring to the work of our predecessors and it is perhaps regrettable that so few have been mentioned here. Twenty-one memorial lectures on and although there is much to celebrate, there are also many challenges. Suffice to say that, in coming this far, all of us owe a debt to Gerald Clough Dunning.

## Appendum: Things aren't what they used to be

My old mate Ken Barton likes to regale me with the story of an early encounter he had with Gerald Dunning, when he was working at Bristol museum. With Dunning due to visit, excavations in the city had produced a complete Saintonge Polychrome jug. Ken had not been able to extract this from the hands of the conservators but as he was leaving to meet Dunning off the train, he spied the jug on a bench in the laboratory, so he picked it up and took the bus to the railway station. Meeting Dunning on the platform, Ken held the pot in front of him saying "Welcome to Bristol, Mar. Dunning". "I have never seen a bigger smile," Ken recalls. "He held that pot like a baby all the way back to the museum". As Head of Archaeological Archives at Historic England, I can scarcely countenance whole pots being taken for impromptu bus-rides but I have to salute the love for their subject and the devil-may-care enthusiasm that burned within these pioneers of medieval pottery studies. Where would we be without them?

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