

# An introduction to Redcliff ware jugs produced in Bristol

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*In 1970 medieval pottery production waste and an abundance of post-medieval pottery were recovered from pits during a salvage excavation on Redcliff Hill, Bristol, opposite the church of St Mary Redcliff. The distinctive wheel-thrown pottery type, a successor to Ham Green ware, was thus named Redcliff ware, after the site where it was found. It has also been referred to as Bristol ware. This paper briefly characterises the ware in terms of both fabric and form.*

## Introduction

This paper provides a brief introduction to the Bristol pottery known as Redcliff ware, and discusses the jugs from the production site alongside vessels recently published from Wells and Mendip Museum and complete vessels from other sites (see Dawson and Ponsford 2016–17 for a full report on this work). These are all correlated with the Bristol Pottery Types (BPT) to illustrate the main range of forms and provide a ready reference (Dawson *et al* 2015). The sherds and the Bristol pottery type series can be consulted in the collections of Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery (accession number BRSMG). The Bristol Pottery Types are defined by a combination of characteristics of form and fabric. The dates given here are derived from archaeological evidence from a long series of excavations in Bristol (Baker *et al* 2018, Appendix 1, 441–536).

## Background

The hand-built wares made between *c* 1120–1250 at Ham Green, six miles to the north-west of Bristol, towards the mouth of the Avon (Dawson *et al* this volume, fig 1, site 10), were first defined by Ken Barton (1963), and its classification and dating was refined by Ponsford (1991). The first indication that wheel-thrown pottery was made in the city of Bristol was found in the foundation trench of the north aisle of St Peter's church in 1970 (Dawson *et al* 1972). Further waste, dated to the period before 1500, was excavated in 2000 in St Thomas Street (Burchill 2004). It is

almost certain that these two deposits derive from the potteries on Redcliff Hill.

## The fabrics

Obvious kiln waste was used to analyse the fabrics produced at Redcliff Hill. Some were selected for thin-section analysis by the late Alan Vince, then of the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton, and later the Department of Urban Archaeology, Museum of London. His comments are incorporated into the fabric descriptions below. Note that the term pottery fabric is used here to distinguish from tile and building material fabrics.

### Pottery fabric A

This is by far the most common fabric at Redcliff Hill and is typical of most Bristol glazed wares of the period *c* 1250–1500. There are minor variations in the quantity and size of inclusions. The fabric normally fires to a creamy colour and often has a grey core. It is occasionally tinged with pink and sometimes reduced to a uniform grey. Some sherds contain occasional large (2–3mm) angular fragments of unhomogenised clay as well as quartz and sandstone. A further variation contains fragments of shale, probably from clays from the Coal Measures, deposits of which occur near to the surface as close as Bedminster (Anstie 1969, 47–9).

Pottery fabric A varies in quality and the combination of inclusions, but the following seem characteristic:

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### *Pottery fabric A type 1*

Occasional fine-grained shale, visible in hand specimens as rounded off-white/grey inclusions often 2 to 3mm across. These can be as small as 0.04mm across and are probably natural inclusions in the clay.

### *Pottery fabric A type 2*

Rounded quartz sand, average diameter 0.3mm. Although some of this is a natural component of the clay, certain sherds have high proportions, probably due to intentional tempering. Minor minerals in the sand are sandstone (sometimes iron stained) and occasionally feldspar and chert. In some sherds, particularly those that are whiter, there are frequent off-white inclusions of unhomogenised clay. In the opinion of these authors these examples are probably later in date. The iron-stained sandstone is probably of Coal Measures origin.

### **Pottery fabric B**

The fabric is similar to fabric A except that it tends to fire to a softer body, with a noticeably pink surface colour suggesting an iron-rich clay. While the inclusions are similar to those in Fabric A and its variants there are fewer of them. Iron gives the characteristic yellow/brown flecking in the glaze. This ware is far less common than in Fabric A, and at Bristol Castle Site F it was not present before *c* 1300 (Ponsford 1980).

### **Pottery fabric C**

Rarely, a red-firing clay, probably the same as that used as a contrasting material on green-glazed vessels, was chosen for the manufacture of vessels with applied decoration in white clay against a brown background. The fabric lacks the type 1 and type 2 inclusions which are always present in pottery fabric A. The sand grain distribution is regular, and therefore different from Fabric A type 2.

There is also a further, more sandy, reddish variant of Fabric A which is characteristic of many later vessels (see BPT 254 below).

## **The characteristics of Redcliff ware jugs**

The glazed jug was the most common form made at Redcliff (note that figures can be found in the catalogue at the end of this paper).

### **Rims**

Two forms can be defined. 'Standard' rims are those which have the characteristic 'nose' below the rim top giving a projecting band or collar (Figs 1 and 2). 'Simple' rims are those which lack this band. There appears to be no chronological difference between the forms at first, but the 'simple' rim tends to

predominate in the 14th century.

### **Bases**

Three principal base-forms can be defined. Frilled or thumb-ed bases, sagging to the depth of the frill, are common at first, following the Ham Green tradition (Barton 1963, 111) (Fig 5). Emulating imports from south-western France, a splayed base appears in the late 13th century, often carefully made and squared (Fig 4). Extra clay was often added to provide the necessary modelling material. The third variation is the simple base with no external modelling (Fig 6). An intermediate stage is reached when the base has only a slight splay to emphasise the basal angle, possibly *c* 1325–50.

### **Handles**

Handles are almost invariably of the strap type. It was common to reinforce the bases of plain ones with two thumb-pads, as with some Ham Green jugs. Where decorated by slashing, the base of the handle was simply thickened with clay, again as with some Ham Green jugs. Later 14th-century handles tend to be thicker and clumsier.

### **Spouts**

At first these were almost invariably bridged, as on Ham Green ware (Barton 1963, 105–6, fig 6) (Figs 4 and 7). Later, probably after *c* 1300, the simple pulled spout begins to appear. This becomes universal after *c* 1350. Unbridged face-spouts are not uncommon in the period *c* 1275–*c* 1350. Common to both Ham Green and Redcliff Hill is the 'bearded bridge-spout', so called from the slashing made to outline the spout.

### **Decoration**

The jugs are often highly decorated, particularly in the early period of manufacture *c* 1250–1325. The body has decoration in the form of applied strips or grooved decoration. The former can be further divided into two types: applied decoration in the body clay, or in a contrasting clay which is either modelled and stands out from the vessel (the 'exotic type'), or thinner slipped decoration which only projects a millimetre or so (the 'standard type'). The 'exotic' decoration appears in the form of anthropomorphic or zoomorphic features, notably face-spouts with limbs and 'inhabited' decoration around the neck, which can include knights, monkeys and birds, sometimes amongst foliage (Ponsford 1979) (Fig 6). A particularly elaborate example of a BPT 118 jug (see below/ Appendix 1) was found in excavations at High Street, Dublin (McCutcheon 2006, 52, fig 20). The 'standard type' of decoration is often in an iron-rich slip and includes varieties of scroll and foliate decoration,

brooches and possibly debased horse-shoes. The influence of imported French wares can be seen in the frequent occurrence of vertically applied and thumbled strips (Fig 7). A common combination on the Redcliff Hill wasters is the use of pads on the neck over vertical applied strips, possibly continuing below a cordon as a scroll or foliate decoration.

On the late examples (after *c* 1325), applied decoration is confined to use of the body clay and applied horizontal thumbled bands just below the rim or at the girth. Grooving is common, but probably more so after *c* 1300. It is often in horizontal bands of several narrow grooves which may be combed vertically from the neck to the girth (Figs 3 and 4). It is sometimes combined with applied work. In general, the decoration does not extend below the top two-thirds of the vessel.

Handles are often decorated with slashing or stabbing, a feature derived from Ham Green ware (Barton 1963, 102, fig 4). The slashing often begins with several downward strokes from the handle top, with descending herring-bone or oblique lines (Barton 1963, fig 3.6) which finish at the base with more vertical strokes. The wasters from St Peter's church bore a consistent slashed pattern of oblique lines between vertical lines (Dawson *et al* 1972). Handles probably became plain after *c* 1350.

Spouts are sometimes decorated with anthropomorphic faces, which are usually crowned (Ponsford 1979) (Figs 5 and 6). They may also be decorated with slashed 'beards' or other motifs at their edges (Rahtz 1960, 240, fig 11). Other face motifs may appear on the edge of the rim. The use of anthropomorphic decoration on the rim and at the spout again derives from the Ham Green tradition: recent, but as yet unpublished, excavations at Ham Green have produced two further examples of bearded face-spouts similar to that illustrated by Barton (1963, 98, figs 1, 21).

## Conclusion

This summary is offered as ready guidance to identifying Redcliff ware jugs. It should be pointed out that other forms of vessel were produced on the site. These together with the medieval and later pottery recovered from Redcliff Hill are fully reported in Dawson and Ponsford (2016–17). As the successor to Ham Green ware from about 1250, it is perhaps not surprising that Redcliff ware jugs were distributed as widely in the Bristol region and on the shores of the Severn Sea (Barton 1963, 115–99; Dawson and Ponsford 2016–17). The collection of over 1,800 sherds from excavations at Glastonbury Abbey may be from an exceptionally wealthy site but illustrates how valued these wares were (Allan *et al* 2015, 261, 264).

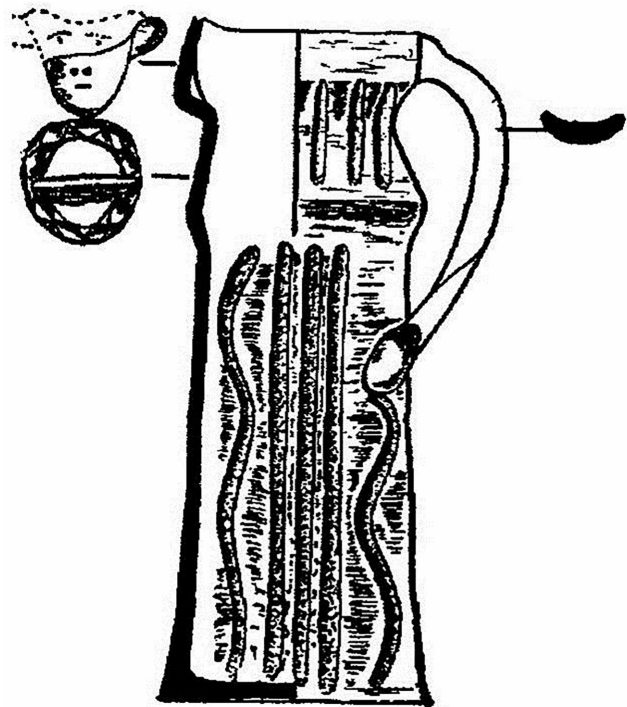
## Acknowledgments

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## Appendix 1: Redcliff jugs classified in the Bristol pottery fabric type series

These have been described previously in Ponsford 1998.

**BPT 67.** Late 13th to early 14th century (Figs 1 and 2). Jugs in fabric type C. A rare type with white slip decoration on a brown iron-rich body. The form and decorative features are similar to BPT 118 jugs. A fine but unusual example is a cylindrical jug with face spout and annular brooch on its breast from Bristol Castle Well (Barton 1959, 173, fig 2.7; Fig 1). Vessel 7 from pit 6 at Wells and Mendip Museum garden is a distorted second in this type (Dawson *et al* 2015,



**Figure 1.** An example of a BPT 67 jug from Bristol Castle Well (H 228mm) found in association with a Saintonge green-glazed jug. Image: Barton 1969, 173–4 no 7 (Reproduced by kind permission of Ken Barton)





**Figure 2.** An example of BPT 67 jugs in fabric C from pit 6, Wells and Mendip Museum.  
Image: Dawson *et al* 2015, 127 no 7; H 242mm approx (Reproduced by courtesy of Wells and Mendip Museum)



**Figure 4.** A close copy of a Saintonge jug in BPT 117 from pit 6 Wells and Mendip Museum, H 310mm. Image: Dawson *et al* 2015, 116 no 2 (Reproduced by courtesy of Wells and Mendip Museum)

fig 11.7; Fig 2). A third example is published from excavations near St. Peter's church, Bristol (Price and Ponsford 1979, figs 20, 20).

**BPT 117.** Late 13th to early 14th century (Figs 3 and 4). Jugs, cylindrical and globular, made in fabric type A, but with smaller inclusions than BPT 118. More care seems to have been taken in the preparation of the clay. The fabric is off-white, sometimes with a partial grey core. Glazes fire to a good quality yellow with frequent green flecks (*cf* south-western French wares – BPT 156). The decoration is almost exclusively in the form of bands of multiple grooving, often combed, from neck to girth or with cylindrical vessels over the central part of the vessel.

**BPT 118.** Late 13th to mid 14th century (Figs 5 and 6). Jugs in the standard fabric A. There is a great variety of form and decoration. The best made and most highly decorated examples belong to the period *c* 1275–*c* 1325. The best groups are from the Constable's Quarters at Bristol Castle and pit 6 at Wells and



**Figure 3.** An example of BPT 117 decorated with combed bands, from pit 6 Wells and Mendip Museum. Image: Dawson *et al* 2015, 129 no 11 (Reproduced by courtesy of Wells and Mendip Museum)



**Figure 5.** Examples of BPT 118

**A:** Waste sherd from Redcliff Hill. Image: Dawson and Ponsford 2016–17 no 52 (Reproduced by courtesy of Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery).



**B:** Jug decorated with applied strips and pellets, spout damaged, from pit 6 Wells and Mendip Museum, H 354mm. Image: Dawson *et al* 2015, 122 no 4 (Reproduced by courtesy of Wells and Mendip Museum)

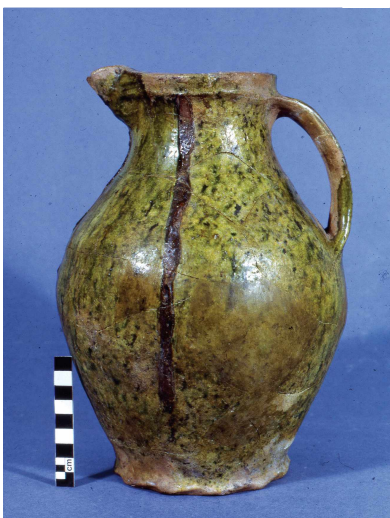
Mendip Museum garden (Ponsford 1980; Dawson *et al* 2015 fig 10.5). The post-1350 largely undecorated types are distinguished by adding the suffix 'L' as in BPT 118L see the fine group from Water Lane (Ponsford 1992, figs 28, 96–9, 102).

**BPT 120.** Late 13th to early 14th century (Fig 7). Jugs in fabric A but in finer clay. These tend to have a



**Figure 6.** An elaborate example of exuberant decoration on BPT 118 from Redcliff Street, Bristol. Image: Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery

smooth, almost sand-free body. Glazes fire to a good quality yellow and applied decoration is in an iron-rich clay. The vessels strongly resemble some north French wares such as those from Rouen. Otherwise vessels are similar in form to early BPT 118 jugs. Fragments from a fine example were found at Bristol Castle site F (Ponsford 1980) and at pit 6 at Wells and Mendip Museum (Dawson *et al* 2015, fig 9.3).



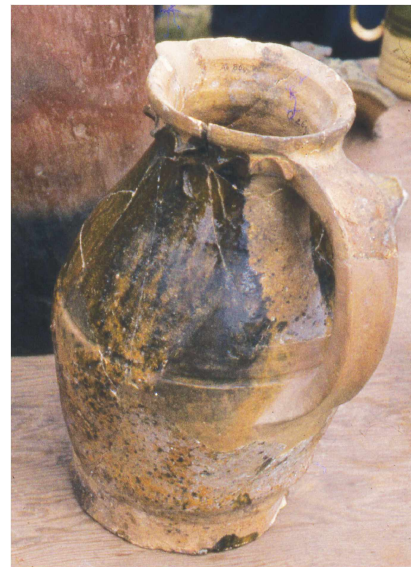
**Figure 7.** An example of BPT 120 from Bristol Castle Well, H 260mm. Image: Barton 1959, 171 no 2 (Reproduced by courtesy of Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery)

**BPT 123.** Jugs entirely in fabric B. They share their characteristics with BPT 118 but appear to date from *c* 1300 in excavated deposits and continuing until *c* 1350. Because of their soft nature there are generally few illustratable sherds.

**BPT 125.** Jugs with grey internal reduced surfaces (date as BPT118).

**BPT 126.** As BPT123 but harder.

**BPT 254.** Date range *c* 1350–1500 (Fig 8). Plain jugs in pottery fabric A. Decoration is confined to a frilled band at the neck or girth, or a grooved band on the neck (Ponsford 1992, 100). It is not uncommon in 14th- to 15th-century groups from Bristol but disappeared, along with BPT 118L, by about 1500.



**Figure 8.** An example of BPT 254; from Avonmouth Docks. Bristol Museum and Art Gallery accession number BCMAG G2691. Image: Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery.

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## Résumé

En 1970, des déchets de cuisson de céramiques médiévales et un lot de céramiques post-médiévales ont été récupérés dans des fosses lors d’une fouille de sauvetage à proximité de l’église St Mary Redcliff à Redcliff Hill, Bristol. Ce type de poterie tournée, très caractéristique, successeur de la céramique connue comme « Ham Green ware », porte donc le nom « Redcliff ware », d’après le site où elle a été trouvée. Il a également été appelé « Bristol ware ». Cet article caractérise brièvement le matériel en termes de pâte et de forme.

## Zusammenfassung

Bei einer Rettungsgrabung wurden 1970 auf dem Redcliff Hill, Bristol, vis-à-vis der Kirche St. Mary Redcliff, mittelalterliche Töpfereiabfälle und eine große Menge frühneuzeitlicher Keramik aus Gruben geborgen. Die markante Drehscheibenkeramik, in der Nachfolge der Ham Green-Ware, wurde daher nach dem Fundort Redcliff-Ware genannt. Sie ist auch als Bristol-Ware bekannt. Dieser Artikel liefert eine kurze Charakterisierung der Ware in Bezug auf Warenart und Form.