

Secretary's Notes



The MPRG council met at the British Museum on the 18th October 2007. The president reported on the JG Hurst Travel Fund, which is now active though as yet no applications for grants have been received. Every effort will be made to promote the fund through other groups to ensure it is widely promoted.

After the success of the pottery training days held earlier in the year, it is proposed that these are run again in 2008. It is hoped that more MPRG members can be encouraged to host one of these days, and anyone who wishes to do so is encouraged to contact Victoria Bryant to register their interest.

The future of the online bibliography is under review, and the group has several options for ensuring the availability of this valuable resource. The Editorial Committee is currently exploring these options and will report back to council on their findings. The next volume of *Medieval Ceramics* is well underway and it is hoped that this volume will be ready for distribution at the conference in 2008. Details of this conference, to be held at the University of Siena, are enclosed with this newsletter. Duncan Brown and Marta Caroscio have organized this event and they are thanked for all their efforts. Duncan Brown reported that the IFA/MPRG bursary at Southampton Museums has been filled by Ben Jervis, who started his year long placement in November.

The council positions of President, Regional Group's Officer, Meetings Secretary and Ordinary Member are becoming vacant as of summer 2008. Any nominations for these positions should be sent to the Secretary as soon as possible. During the council meeting it was suggested that the option of re-election to certain council positions be reassessed, most importantly for the positions of President and Vice President. This would mean that the President or Vice-president could be elected to serve a second a three year term if the group felt that was appropriate. It is hoped that this will offer the group greater continuity and allow us to move forward in our aims. Further details of this proposed change are contained within.

Anne Boyle Secretary

Changes to MPRG Constitution

Over the last six years MPRG has been placed on a sound and improving financial footing. This has meant that the group is now more active than ever in pursuing its academic and professional aims. The role of the President is increasingly involved with promoting the role of the specialist community within the wider archaeological profession. The current constitution only allows the President and Vice-President to remain in post for three years and they are not eligible for re-election at the end of this term. The committee felt that such a short term meant that the president was unable to see through projects and initiatives that are important to furthering the aims of the group and its members.

As a result of discussions the committee has decided that the Group should be asked at the AGM at Sienna in July to vote to change the constitution (a copy of the constitution can be found in *Medieval Ceramics* 21 p 145-146) in order to allow the President and Vice-President to be elected to serve a **second** consecutive term of three years if this was felt to be appropriate and the officer was willing. The maximum number of years a President or Vice-President could serve would therefore be six years rather than three years.

This change is being announced now so that people who wish to raise objections can do so before the next committee meeting in March in order for them to be addressed prior to the pre-AGM mailing. If anyone would like to comment on the suggested change please contact the group secretary Anne Boyle.

Andrew Sage

Ben Starts Work!

The Medieval Pottery Research Group in association with Southampton City Council were successful in their application for a one year workplace learning bursary from the Institute of Field Archaeologists to allow a trainee to develop a specialism in the study of medieval pottery. MPRG are committed to undertake and facilitate training at all levels.

Hello everyone! I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Ben Jervis and I was recently taken on as a Medieval Pottery Researcher at Southampton Museum under the IFA Workplace bursary scheme. The position is supported by the MPRG. Some of you will have already met me at MPRG conferences and up until now I have been working on Late Saxon pottery assemblages as part of my BA and MA courses. In this position I am taking on a bigger challenge, initially analyzing the pottery from the multi-period site at York Buildings, Southampton. It is intended that this will be published in a forthcoming edition of Medieval Ceramics. The placement is intended to allow me to develop my skills in analyzing pottery as well as improve my knowledge of material I am not so familiar with, at the moment that is most of the High and Late Medieval pottery! Fortunately the position is supervised by Duncan Brown and I'm sure I shall benefit from his encyclopedic knowledge of Southampton pottery. Later in the year I shall hopefully be working on further assemblages and applying my skills with the Southampton City Council Archaeology Unit, spot dating assemblages and writing assessment reports. As well as that I will be working with museum volunteers and students, hopefully to get more people involved in medieval pottery studies. So far I'm really enjoying the challenge of the job and look forward to meeting and working with as many people in the field as possible and am very proud to have been chosen for the position and to be strengthening my short association with the MPRG.

If you would like to contact me about the bursary or the work I am undertaking I can be contacted by email: ben.jervis@southampton.gov.uk

Ben Jervis

Early Medieval SEMPER Meet

A small but very select group attended a meeting of the South East Midlands Pottery Research Group (SEMPER) held at Bucks County Museum, Aylesbury, on Saturday 13 October. This enabled us to view and discuss pottery in an informal way. The theme of the day was Early

Medieval Pottery, but we at SEMPER never restrict ourselves to the immediate theme and the day had many varied and interesting talks. One item for discussion was whether we should even be using the term 'early medieval', as this is understood by historians to mean the whole post-Roman period. Views were many and varied – and no firm conclusion was reached.

Helen Walker spoke about Early Medieval ware in Essex, including the material from the production site at Frogs Hall Takeley. Early Medieval ware in Essex spans the 10th to early 13th centuries and is widely distributed throughout the county, although in some areas, especially close to River Thames, its niche is filled by shelly ware fabrics. As well as the classic coarse sand-tempering, there are occasional variants with the addition of flint, grog or chalk. Vessels are coil-built and horizontal break lines above the base and around the shoulder and neck suggest they were built-up in sections, the joins creating lines of weakness. Quite a variety of vessel forms were made, often showing simple combed decoration or thumb-applied strips. As well as the ubiquitous cooking pot, more specialized forms, such as socketed bowls, lamps, storage jars, spouted pitchers (of both Late Saxon and Wessex types) curfews and cheese presses were made. Amongst the finds at the Stansted Airport excavations were glazed tripod pitchers with incised lattice decoration, a form more characteristic of central-southern England (see below).

So far, only one Early Medieval Ware production site has been excavated; at Frogs Hall Takeley, in north-west Essex, manufacturing pottery transitional between Early Medieval Ware and Medieval Coarse Ware. The pottery was fired in kiln structures as opposed to clamp kilns. Most are of Musty's type 1b with a single stoking pit, but a few appear to have two opposing stoking pits (Musty's type 2c), similar to those of the Heddingham group (situated about 25km to the north-east). The introduction of kiln-firing and wheel-throwing do not happen at the same time as the Frogs Hall pottery shows the same evidence of coil-building in sections as classic Early Medieval Ware. As well as evolving into the finer, thinner-walled Medieval Coarse Ware (as evidenced at Frogs Hall), Early Medieval Ware was probably the ancestor of the Essex Sandy Orange wares.

Anna Slowikowski introduced us to the recent excavations at Bedford Castle. The castle was besieged and slighted in 1224. With the exception of some industrial activity in the late medieval period, the land was left unoccupied till the expansion of the town in the 18th and 19th centuries. A selection of pottery was on view but the work is still at a

very early stage with more excavation to come, so we hope that more may be said of the pottery at a future SEMPER meeting.

John Cotter reported on some work he has been doing on tripod pitchers. These characteristic vessels are large, usually round bodied with a single handle and three small feet. They are found largely in Wessex, Oxfordshire and the West Midlands and are fairly tightly dated to the 11th and 12th centuries.

Paul Blinkhorn showed us a fascinating group of vessels from Christ Church College, Oxford. These had been used in alchemical experiments and had suffered from the results of ferocious heat, possibly from an explosion. There were no vessels of unusual or specialized form; all were ordinary domestic wares including 'cruets' in Brill/Boarstall ware. Among them were vessels with pierced clay bungs in their necks.

The afternoon was dedicated to shorter contributions and pottery viewing. Hilary Healey handed round examples of floor tiles from Lincs. Among them was an all-over stamped tile from Reevesby Abbey, another from the same site, which had been re-shaped by neatly chipping off the corners, and a stamped relief floor tiles from Swineshead, Lincs, similar to tiles from Ramsey Abbey, shown by Paul Spoerry at a previous SEMPER meeting. John Cotter showed us some examples of sherds stained purple from madder. Lorraine Mephram, brought pottery from Stotfold, Beds and floor tiles from Towcester, Northants, the latter with interesting line-impressed designs, among them rosettes, crowned heads and small dogs, all reminiscent of designs occurring on 14th century tiles from Warden Abbey, Beds.

Mike Farley brought us back to the immediate locality by talking about the pottery from the original Walton Street excavation, in Aylesbury, in 1973-4. He also brought some of the pottery along for viewing. Slightly off on a tangent, but nevertheless interesting, Anna Slowikowski described the work she has been doing as part of an ALSF project to take archaeology into schools, bringing artefacts, especially pottery, into the classroom and doing sorting activities with the children. And finally, Barbara Hurman had been trawling through her library at home and had pulled out some books on archaeology, now collectors' items. It was interesting to note how few books there were around, when members were first venturing into pottery studies. Barbara drew our attention to a particularly apposite quote from Flinders-Petrie:

'Pottery is, however, the greatest resource of the archaeologist. For variety of form and texture, for decoration, for rapid change, for its quick fall into oblivion, and for its incomparable abundance, it is in every respect the most important material for study and it constitutes the essential alphabet of archaeology in every land'.

(W.M. Flinders Petrie, 1904, *Methods and Aims in Archaeology*, pp15-6)

All in all, it was a very fruitful day with interesting, varied talks and, most important, plenty of pottery to handle! The spring meeting will be held in Essex on Saturday, 12 April – put that date in your diaries now! The theme of the day is still to be decided, but, following on from the interest in Barbara's books, there will be an opportunity to sell, exchange or give away your old archaeology books. Please contact me if you have any ideas or want further details.

Anna Slowikowski

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The Very Best Sort of Earthenware

On 27th October 2007 a conference on the late and post medieval potteries at Ticknall was held at Sharpe's Pottery in Swadlincote, Derbyshire. The event, which was organized by the East Midlands regional group and the Derbyshire Archaeological Society, was attended by over forty people. The focus of the day was the Midlands Purple and Cistercian ware produced at Ticknall. Julie Edwards, David Barker and Anne Boyle presented papers that examined these wares at a regional level, whilst Janet Spavold and Sue Brown spoke about the documentary evidence for the potteries. The recent excavation of the first kiln to be discovered in the village was discussed by Ian Rowlandson, Jane Young (on behalf of Alan Vince) presented the results of ICPS analysis on Cistercian and Midlands Purple ware from Ticknall and John Hudson spoke about the potters and their production sites. A range of Cistercian and Midlands Purple ware from Ticknall was on display and several of those attending the conference brought along examples of these wares from their local collections. This resulted in several pieces being paralleled with the Ticknall products. It is hoped the day highlighted some of the products of Ticknall and will encourage further study of this important potting centre.

Book Review

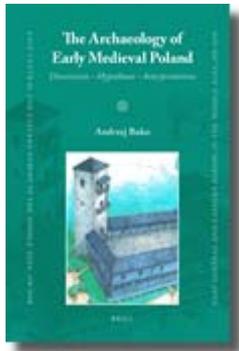
Andrzej Buko

**THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF EARLY MEDIEVAL POLAND;
DISCOVERIES – HYPOTHESES – INTERPRETATIONS**

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This is the first academic book which concentrates on the discoveries of medieval date (6th-13th centuries) from the territory of modern Poland. The book covers the principal research questions, such as the origins of the Slavs, societies of the proto-state period and the origins of the Polish state. The volume also includes a discussion of the most

interesting, sometimes controversial, archaeological discoveries or issues. These include pagan Slavonic holy places, the monumental mounds of Little Poland, the first traces of medieval writing, exceptional strongholds, the

origins of Polish towns, rural landscapes, archaeology of the oldest monastic complexes, and the question of locals and aliens viewed through archaeological evidence and many other topics.

The book is meant mainly for students, archaeologists and historians. It can also be useful for a wider audience interested in the history and archaeology of central Europe.

In November 2006 "The Archaeology of Early Medieval Poland" received the KLIO Award from the Association of Polish History Publishers.

Andrzej Buko, Ph.D. (1978) in Archaeology, Institute for the History of Material Culture, is director of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He has published widely on prehistoric and mediaeval archaeology and the methods for the classification and analysis of ceramics

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