



**PREHISTORIC CERAMICS RESEARCH GROUP
&
THE PREHISTORIC SOCIETY
JOINT CONFERENCE**

**THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF BRITISH
PREHISTORIC POTTERY: FINDS,
METHODS, INTERPRETATIONS**

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ABSTRACTS

Department of Archaeology
University of Manchester

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John Collis

(University of Sheffield)

Attributes and horizons: a different approach to ceramic chronology in Iron Age Hampshire

My experience in both central France and central Hampshire shows there is a problem with both nomenclature and definition if we use the traditional approaches to chronology construction, with (ceramic) phases and type fossils. I have already discussed the methodological and theoretical basis of what we are trying to do in papers in conferences in Lille (Lehoërf, Bibracte 16, 2008) and Linz (Karl/Leskovar Interpretierte Eisenzeiten 3, 2009), and in this paper I wish to make a preliminary presentation on how I am trying to apply these ideas to the Iron Age and Roman settlement at Owslebury, Hants which I excavated in the 1960s.

Frances Healy¹, Alex Bayliss² and Alasdair Whittle¹

(¹ University of Cardiff

² English Heritage)

Causewayed enclosures, ceramics and chronology

The causewayed enclosures built and used in southern Britain in the fourth millennium cal BC have been bound up with the study of the area's Neolithic pottery since they were identified in the early twentieth century. This stemmed initially from their large stratified assemblages, which formed a key to typology and relative chronology, and from the realisation that these assemblages included vessels from non-local sources. Focus later shifted to interpreting the use and deposition of the assemblages. A recently completed project which aimed to date causewayed enclosures more precisely has thus also refined the dating of their contained assemblages. Since the project has also entailed analysis of the early Neolithic dating evidence from the areas in which the enclosures lie, it has permitted a review of the development, contexts, and interrelations of the pottery traditions of the period. These can be placed in pattern of shifting scales and levels of activity in which links between enclosures, changes in material culture, and the expansion of exchange networks are refined. The developments of the 38th and 37th centuries cal BC come into particular focus.

David Knight¹ and Edward Faber²

(¹ Trent & Peak Archaeology

² University of Nottingham)

Along Trent, Soar and beyond: petrographic and microprobe analyses of later prehistoric granodiorite-tempered pottery from Midland England

Petrographic studies of prehistoric pottery from the East Midlands have identified several distinctive fabrics containing angular granitoid inclusions that it has been suggested may derive from the Mountsorrel granodiorite complex of Charnwood Forest. This provides an interesting complement to studies of Saxon pottery from the East Midlands (Williams and Vince 1997) and, if verified by further work, would add significantly to the growing evidence for long-distance ceramic exchange networks in prehistoric Britain. A recent review of thin section analyses of prehistoric granodiorite-tempered pottery concluded that the results should be tested by

chemical analyses aimed at comparing individual mineral and rock inclusions with samples from different Charnwood rock sources in order to distinguish between potential sources (Knight et al. 2003). Such an approach is particularly important as the granitoid inclusions in prehistoric pottery thin sections generally comprise only a few crystals, which given the coarse-grained nature of these rocks does not enable sufficiently robust comparisons to be made with the putative Mountsorrel source.

This paper focuses upon a recently completed project, funded through English Heritage's Historic Environment Enabling Programme, aimed at elucidating by petrographic and electron microprobe analysis the production and distribution of prehistoric pottery incorporating granitoid inclusions deriving from rock sources in Charnwood Forest. This has confirmed the hypothesis of a Charnwood source for many granitoid inclusions in pottery spanning the Earlier Neolithic to Late Iron Age periods, but has also identified multiple sources for both the rock inclusions and potting clays within the East Midlands. This has major implications for our understanding of prehistoric ceramic exchange networks in the region and for changes in production patterns over time, and we hope will provide a basis for isotope analyses of pottery fabrics aimed at establishing the potential of this innovative technique for determining raw material sources.

References:

- Knight, D, Marsden, P. and Carney, J. 2003. 'Local or non-local? Prehistoric granodiorite-tempered pottery in the East Midlands'. In Gibson, A. ed. *Prehistoric Pottery: People, Pattern and Purpose*, 111-125. Oxford: BAR International Series 1156.
- Williams, D.F. and Vince, A. 1997. 'The characterisation and interpretation of early to middle Saxon granitic tempered pottery in England'. *Medieval Archaeology* 61, 214-20.

Robert Lenfert

(University of Nottingham)

Recent submerged finds of Later Prehistoric Pottery from Outer Hebridean island dwellings

While the later prehistoric pottery industry from the Western Isles of Scotland is well-established in contrast to largely aceramic areas of Northern Britain during this period, only three island dwelling excavations have returned later prehistoric ceramic finds within the past thirty years (Dun Vulcan, Dun Bharabhat and Berigh, Riof). Recent underwater investigations have effectively doubled that number with finds from three intriguing island sites on North Uist: Dun Ban, Dun An T-Siamain, and Dun Nighean Rìgh Lochlainn.

I would like to share details of this new assemblage with a specialist audience and briefly discuss how ceramics can be the most reliable (or equally contentious!) avenue of placing Hebridean sites within their correct chronological context. This aspect is especially relevant given the general lack of non-ceramic artefact typologies in the Western Isles versus the quantity of antiquarian ceramics in existence. By highlighting this new material my aim overall is to a.) define how ceramics have influenced established chronologies between structural sequences and occupation in the Hebrides, and b.) pave the way for a further, more detailed analysis of this particular material by liaising with an interested specialist.

Helen L. Loney¹ and Andrew W. Hoan¹

(¹ ISE, University of Worcester)

Rethinking the 'aceramic' Iron Age in northwestern Britain: evidence from the excavations at Baldhowend, the Lake District, Cumbria

Excavations at Baldhowend, an unenclosed settlement dating to the late first millennium BC and first centuries AD, discovered a number of pieces of pottery production and use in association with craft activities. Little is known about pottery production and use in northern Britain prior to Roman occupation, but there has been a long-standing speculation that pottery production drops out of the cultural technological repertoire during the Late Bronze Age. This speculation was in part supported by the suggestion that upland Cumbria had been depopulated during the first millennium, with people and pottery arriving in the first centuries AD, along with a Roman-led economy. Excavations at Glencoyne Park and Baldhowend have demonstrated the continuous occupation of upland Cumbria during the late third, second, first millennium BC and first centuries AD.

This paper will present the evidence of pottery use from Baldhowend with the intention of revisiting the notion of the apparent 'aceramic' Iron Age of the area. The discussion will include an analysis of potential reasons behind the poor quality pottery record, including preservation. The evidence will be used to consider the role of pottery within a society that may have ceased production, but not use of ceramic items. The final discussion will introduce the concept of non-linear technological trajectories, within larger socio-cultural development systems.

Frances Lynch
(Bangor University)

New pottery from North Wales: Fengate or Grooved Ware?

A hands-on session.

Elaine Morris
(University of Southampton)

Bronze Age salt production in the Fenland region

Recent archaeological fieldwork in the Cambridgeshire Fen-edge has revealed new evidence of Bronze Age salt production. Excavations at two well-dated sites have produced specialised ceramic assemblages created specifically for the evaporation of brine to make salt crystals. This material, however, is highly varied. Radiocarbon dating may provide the clues as to why this is the case. This presentation will explore the evidence, discuss the dating and variation between these assemblages, compare the evidence to assemblages from elsewhere in eastern England, and propose at least one explanation for the variation.

David Mullin
(Oxford Archaeology)

New discoveries of Grooved Ware and Beakers from Cirencester, Gloucestershire

This paper will outline new discoveries of Grooved Ware and Beakers from a development site at Cirencester, Gloucestershire and discuss their wider significance. The Grooved Ware was

recovered from a series of pits and was found alongside worked flint, worked bone, plant remains and a number of other finds. Radiocarbon dating suggests a short period of deposition of this material, which includes rare "lattice-lozenge" Woodlands sub-style pottery. The Beakers were recovered from two graves, one of which included the 'head and hooves' of mature cattle. Isotopic analysis suggests that the people buried with the Beakers were non-local. The wider context of these finds will be discussed.

Patrick Quinn

(University of Sheffield)

An on-line database for archaeological petrography

Petrographic data on artefacts is normally underrepresented in the archaeological literature, with published analyses generally supported by a few black-and-white micrographs at the most, and fabric descriptions rarely included. This situation severely hinders the comparison of petrographic data between different studies, sites, analysts and laboratories.

In response to this problem, a project is in progress at the University of Sheffield Departments of Archaeology and Computer Science to design and build the first on-line petrographic database. This tool will provide an efficient means of storing, accessing and disseminating archaeological petrographic data, including colour micrographs, petrographic descriptions and associated information about artefacts.

The prototype database, expected in summer 2010, will be populated initially with data from ceramic analyses at University of Sheffield, Department of Archaeology, but will be made available to other analysts thereafter. Users will be able to browse and search petrographic data on ceramics and other artefacts using a user-friendly web interface, as well as uploading their own projects. Central to the system will be large, high-resolution polarizing light micrographs of individual thin sections for direct comparison during microscope work.

The inevitable transferral of petrographic information into databases such as that being developed here will greatly assist the curation of extensive thin section collections that exist in the UK and elsewhere, ensuring their survival for future generations. Given that most petrographers are never very far from a computer, the presentation and manipulation of extremely large amounts of data and reference material through this medium also has obvious benefits for research productivity.

Henrietta Quinnell

(Exeter University)

Middle Iron Age pottery in south west Britain

A summary of recent significant developments in the study of South Western Decorated (SWD) ware in Devon and Cornwall covering chronology, sources, styles and deposition. The paper brings together a range of work, supported by C14 dates, from developer-funded work and from analysis, sponsored by English Heritage, of data from pre-WWII excavations at Trevelgue cliff castle, Newquay. General use of the ware across the region was established around 300 cal BC, rather than c 400 cal BC as previously thought, but an early variant was present in some contexts in the late 4th century BC. Detailed study has revealed slight chronological differences in vessel form and decoration. There is clear evidence for the deposition of vessels of slightly

different decorative styles in different types of contexts. In Cornwall the use of gabbroic clays was almost universal but in Devon there appear to have been multiple sources and less exchange. Usage of SWD in the Late Iron Age differed markedly in Cornwall and Devon.

Daniel Sahlen

(University of Glasgow/National Museums Scotland)

Ceramic technology and tradition in late prehistoric Scotland: the evidence from crucibles and pottery

The study of ceramic technology has in recent years changed its focus from economic models to enquiries of human decision-making and choices, looking particular at the sequence of production and its context. This has given us new insights not only of personal decision-making but also to social traditions and relations. Ceramic studies in Scotland have rarely looked at the ceramic technology beyond characterisation. Most studies have instead tried to constructed chronological sequences or studied the provenance of the material.

In this presentation I will discuss some of the conclusions from my PhD thesis, where I have looked the ceramic technology of metalworking ceramics and pottery from Late Bronze Age and Iron Age Scotland. Some early thoughts of this work was present at the last conference in Manchester organised by Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group, and I will use some the ideas presented there as a starting point. The use of clay and the preparation of the ceramic paste for different ceramic materials will be in focus, but I will relate this to further discussions of technological practice and traditions.

Bryan Stith

(The Manchester Museum)

Miscellaneous pottery from the collections of The Manchester Museum

This hands-on session offers an opportunity to view pottery from the collections of The Manchester Museum that are not normally on display, including the Castleshaw excavations (pit with Bronze Age pottery), and Iron Age pot given to the Museum by Christopher Hawkes, and Late Iron Age pottery from Canning Cross, Wiltshire.

Graham Taylor

(Potted History)

Prehistoric pottery production: a potter's perspective

This paper will consider the evidence for various prehistoric pottery making techniques from the potter's point of view. Is information from excavations being lost due to a lack of understanding of ceramic technology on the part of the archaeologist? I believe that it is, and that much more could be gained if a ceramic technology specialist were involved. 'A coil pot' is not simply a 'coil pot' in fact it is almost never a 'coil pot', there are probably as many methods of making a pot as there have been potters. The method of manufacture has implications for the evidence of manufacture on a site. Clay lined pits in Bronze Age settlements high in the Cheviot Hills of Northumberland, far from sources of clay, may in fact be clay storage pits. Unexplained hollows

in the floor may be pot formers used in a hammer and anvil technique. Could inclusions in some clay bodies be accidental or fortuitous and what can they tell us anything about the clay preparation techniques? The term bonfire is still applied to prehistoric firings and yet most pottery was probably fired in the domestic hearth. Tools used for pot making are almost always items that were originally made for other purposes and are not easily recognised in an archaeological context. The way in which pottery is used and disposed of has a direct bearing on its survival and decomposition. With an understanding of clay, and potters, gained from a lifetime making pots, I use replication and experimentation as a tool to better understand ancient processes and the evidence they leave behind. I will not claim to have answered all, or indeed any of the above questions, but I will propose some hypotheses which may be worthy of testing in the field.

Julian Thomas

(University of Manchester)

The Stonehenge landscape before Stonehenge

While much of the work of the Stonehenge Riverside Project has focused on the relationship between Stonehenge itself and Durrington Walls, many of the other sites that have been investigated (The Greater Cursus, Amesbury 42 long barrow, tree-throw hole beneath the bank at Woodhenge, and arguably the Tor Stone and the Cuckoo Stone) actually relate to earlier phases of activity in the landscape. From the Mesolithic into the Early Neolithic we can identify the gradual formation of a complex of monuments which would be replaced by the henges of the third millennium BC. At the heart of this change, I will argue, is a change in the relationship between the living and the dead, which is itself connected to changing conceptions of the community. The emergence of Stonehenge is thus embedded in deeper historical trajectories.

Emma Thompson¹ and Rick Peterson¹

(¹University of Central Lancashire)

Irish Connections: a new Neolithic assemblage from Blasthill, Argyll

An assemblage of six substantially complete Earlier Neolithic vessels was recovered from excavations on the Blasthill Chambered Tomb, Argyll during summer 2009. This paper will present results from the analysis of this material, including petrology, direct 14C dating of charred residue and organic residue analysis. This in-depth study of a well preserved assemblage allows us to see a pottery sequence at the site running from first construction c. 3900 cal BC to the deposition of a vessel with a date between 3630 and 3360 cal BC. There appears to be petrological evidence of local production but the whole assemblage has clear links with Irish Neolithic pottery. These include vessel style, size, construction techniques and usage. This paper will conclude by examining the nature of this connection and considering mechanisms for the transmission of this knowledge during the Early Neolithic.

Isobel Thompson

(Historic Environment Unit, Hertford)

The hunt for the Middle Iron Age in Hertfordshire and its implications

In strong contrast to the rich density of the late Iron Age in Hertfordshire, very little is known about the preceding few centuries. The major centres of Baldock, Braughing, Welwyn and

Verulamium appear suddenly, with an equally sudden exponential growth in visible archaeology. Sites with recognisably Middle Iron Age pottery are perceived as virtually unknown across much of the county. However, work at the Historic Environment Unit, with a study of the grey literature, has led to the conclusion that this is a false view. Middle Iron Age sites do exist, many more of them than has been realised. This presentation will show something of what has been found, and speculate on the implications of the distribution. It will also ask for discussion of an underlying problem, lack of recognition of this material by contractors in the field, and the consequent difficulties inherent in the grey literature. Too many reports rely on succinct written statements of the types of pottery represented on a site, without illustration of any kind. But such statements are opinion, not evidence. Scale drawings of pottery are increasingly rare, even in published excavation reports; but all reports could at the very least include digital photographs as a normal procedure.

Practical hands-on sessions

Anybody wishing to bring examples of pottery to demonstrate their assemblages or to find help with identification and dating of a pot, is welcome to do so. A table for laying out pottery will be available in a separate room on Saturday. We look forward to only hearing about, but also seeing a wide range of pottery at the conference!