

Medieval Period – General Introduction

Notes taken from workshop given by Paul Blinkhorn March 2015.

Lots of potteries around here – four between here and Kettering/Corby.

Clay inclusions: chaff, shell, sand, rock, chalk, mica, or a mixture. Quite a lot of sandstone/limestone temper in this locality because of the geology.

Fast wheel method: Throwing rings on the inside and sometimes also on the outside. Symmetrical shape.

Slow wheel method: Like an icing turntable, pot built up with coils. Uneven inside and criss cross wipe marks where the potter has tried to even the walls up. Not as symmetrical as fast thrown pots.

Firing – Late Saxons use kilns but post 1066 pottery fired in bonfires. Part-time potters – make pots during summer when can dry the clay and run small holding/dig ditches during winter. Bonfire firing – some parts red some parts black because uneven firing. Colour variation, patches of sooting. Black and dark grey. 13th/14th centuries is the High Medieval period – updraught kilns – much hotter e.g. 800-1200 degrees F. Used prunings from manorial orchards. Late Medieval kilns were quite complex so produced very good quality pottery. Have to fire limestone tempered pots at lower temperatures or they disintegrate.

High oxygen: red, orange, brown.

Very low iron clays fire white/grey/orange.

Low oxygen: grey, black. In clamp or kiln with blocked up flue.

Decoration:

Incised – rouletting (roller with a design impressed on it)

Applied – strips of clay added and then decorated with thumb prints or rouletting.

In the high medieval period faces sometimes applied eg Lyvedon Stanion, also knight pots, face pots.

Glazes: 11th-14th centuries – dullish glazes. Orange (high oxygen), green (low oxygen)

15th-16th centuries – bright green (copper) glaze. Manganese and iron makes purple, purple/brown, black glazes.

15th century Late medieval transition wares – well made pots but poor glazing.

Slip – mainly white then glaze on top. Can have red fabric, white slip on top cut through to show the fabric, then green glaze on top of that. Painted stripes – Lyvedon Stanion – appear yellow under the green glaze. Can have reddish-brown slip stripes.

Forms:

12th century: mostly jars

13th century: mostly jars (slightly more) and jugs

14th century: equal proportion of jars and jugs

15th century: specialised forms and jugs most common

10th-12th centuries (late Saxon) – small wheel thrown pots

Early medieval: slow wheel thrown pots

High medieval: huge wheel thrown pots

Late medieval: small wheel thrown pots.

Early medieval jars have round bases (Roman ones have flat bases).

11th-12th century bowls were shallow and wide.

12th and 13th century ones were smaller.

14th-16th century pancheons – wider and deeper.

There were not too many jugs in the 11th-12th centuries but those there were were unglazed or simply glazed and made using the slow wheel technique. Tripod pitchers
13th-14th centuries – fantastic glazes. Fast wheel and kiln fired.
14-16th centuries: slow wheel, simple glazed drinking vessels.
400-1400: no pottery cups made or used.
Late 15th century chamber pots came in.

Other forms include:

Lamps, saturated with fat, could be hung upside down as well.

13th century curfeu – fire cover – sooted on inside.

Metalworking crucibles e.g. Stamford ware

Pipkin – early saucepan.

Skillet – early frying pan.

Late 13th-14th centuries – candlesticks.

Lachrymy – held water for hand washing – often have sheep or knight on horseback on them. 1200 sheep farming extremely important in this part of the world.

14th century onwards costrels – water bottles for travellers.

Late medieval – dripping dishes – sort of grill pan under spit roasted meats. Burnt on one side.

Watering pots – hole in base – put thumb on top (late 14th-15 centuries cottage gardens beginning to appear.)

Not many lids. Pastry used to make lids.

15th century saw the introduction of drinking cups.

Bunghole cisterns for brewing beer. 14th century onwards hops used to stop beer going off.

15th-16th centuries money boxes, but with no hole in the bottom. Also grenades – filled with tar (light the rag and throw over the wall).

By the end of the medieval period, anything and everything was made e.g. fish smoker, sweet moulds, drinking horns.