The Transformation of Tradition: the Origins of the Post-medieval Ceramic Tradition in Yorkshire

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Introduction

My intention in this paper is to examine some of the explanations advanced for the changes seen in pottery making traditions in Yorkshire and neighbouring areas during the period between c.1450 and c. 1700. In addition to providing a critique of established views I hope to be able to suggest, in a preliminary way, an alternative perspective on the observation that, in a matter of a few generations, the established medieval potting tradition, which dated back to the mid 11th century, changed radically and fundamentally.

In prehistoric archaeology changes in social practice, manifested as changes in architectural expression, material culture styles or raw material exploitation, have prompted archaeologists to investigate the causes and parameters of change from a variety of theoretical standpoints. In contrast, historical archaeology in Britain has, until recently, taken the end of the medieval period (c. 1500) to be a kind of immutable barrier, after which concern becomes largely focused onto essentially technological questions surrounding the development of industrial and manufacturing processes (cf. Gaimster 1994, Johnson 1996 and Courtney 1997 for fuller discussions of the issue). This appears to contrast with history, a field in which the investigation of social and cultural change has outstripped archaeological perspectives (e.g. Smail 1992, Brewer and Porter 1993, Glennie 1995). There are welcome signs that this situation is beginning to change (including Egan and Michael 1999, Tarlow and West 1999, Gaimster and Stamper 1997) but, as I hope to show in this paper, much remains to be done. Specifically I hope to bring to the pottery of the post-medieval period a contextual archaeological
perspective and to try to apply some of the principles and approaches which have proved useful in studies of earlier periods.

Southern Yorkshire has been chosen as the case study area for a number of reasons. Most immediately, it is the area in which I live and work but, in addition, the area has, in the past, been relatively well served in terms of the reporting and publication of later medieval and post-medieval pottery. On the other hand, synthetic and interpretative accounts of the wider implications to be drawn from ceramic evidence have tended to focus upon London and the south-east and to make scant use of the wealth of data available from the Midlands and the north of England. A number of these accounts will be discussed below.

🔺 The pottery of the post-medieval period

The precise definition of the end of the medieval period and the beginning and duration of the post-medieval and early modern periods are variable. Traditionally the medieval period has been held to end c. 1500 and the post-medieval to cover the period c. 1500 to c. 1750, partially congruent with the early modern period. The discussion in this paper will cover the period c. 1450 – c. 1700 taking in the latter part of the medieval period and the majority of the post-medieval period, interpreted in their broadest terms. That this periodisation will violate established institutional boundaries is not deemed to be a problem as part of the purpose of the paper is to challenge some aspects of the established frames of reference and to highlight issues which have not been given the prominence that they deserve. I have discussed the salient characteristics of the pottery of the later medieval period elsewhere (Cumberpatch 1997, see also Hayfield 1988) and the distinctive character of those types which can be considered as post-medieval will become apparent in the course of this discussion.

Any consideration of post-medieval pottery must start with the papers recently published by Gaimster, Nenk and Barton (Barton 1992, Gaimster 1994, Gaimster and Nenk 1997). A broader perspective has been provided by Joan
Thirk in her discussion of the management of the Tudor economy (1978).

Gaimster (1994) has divided the period 1450–1750 into three shorter phases, each of one hundred years duration (1450–1550, 1550-1650 and 1650-1750). His emphasis, notwithstanding the title of the paper, is on developments in London and the south-east, with the remainder of the country deemed to follow London at a slower pace with some regional and, in the case of Scotland, national, variations.

Gaimster has suggested that during the later 15th and early 16th centuries wealth became increasingly concentrated in towns with the rise of an urban mercantile and artisan elite who sought to represent their status through the conspicuous display of consumable goods, including metal, glassware, clothing and furnishings. Amongst these goods were ceramic vessels of European and local manufacture which moved ‘up-market’ to compete with the traditionally more expensive metal wares and glassware. Individual ceramic drinking vessels replaced wooden vessels. Amongst these items were imported stoneware mugs and locally produced whitewares (Border wares) and the darker Cistercian wares and Blackwares. The early 16th century saw a greater formality in dining, with individual place settings marked by individual vessels and utensils. Decorated ceramic vessels, cheaper than pewter vessels, allowed the lower middle classes to emulate the upper middle classes and it is emulation which Gaimster sees as the critical impulse prompting these changes. The popularity of Tin Glazed Earthenware is deemed to be one example of this process together with the increasing scale of imports of Low Countries redwares, and the appearance of local copies, which may indicate a parallel demand for utilitarian wares emulating more expensive metal cooking vessels. It is this period which has been dubbed the Post-Medieval Ceramic Revolution and which Gaimster has sought to describe and explain (1994, Gaimster and Nenk 1997).

The later 16th century saw further urban growth and improvements in living standards. There are indications that a wider range of tablewares were available, including foreign and imported glassware and Chinese porcelain. The import of Rhenish stonewares seems to have
increased and by the early 17th century attempts to produce stoneware in London had begun. There are also indications that a greater range of vessels was available, relating to distinctions between vessels used for food preparation and those used in consumption (cf. Yentsch 1991). Local developments in southern England include the broadening of the range of Border wares to include more open forms (notably flanged dishes) and the establishment of the English Tin Glazed Earthenware industry. Slip trailed wares offered a distinctive option for those unable to afford the more expensive types. Gaimster suggests that the production of these vessels was stimulated by the import of slip trailed and sgraffito earthenwares from northern Europe.

Gaimster’s final phase (1650-1750) is of less direct concern in the context of the present paper, but probate inventories suggest that the ownership of commodities increased and that from the early 18th century there was a significant rise in the quantities of tablewares and other domestic utensil items. The rise of white salt glazed stonewares, other 18th century wares and the massive increase in the volumes of Chinese wares available following the opening up of the port of Canton in 1715 represents a further development which lies outside the scope of this paper. Similarly the rise of tea and coffee drinking was part of wider changes in social practice which have been dealt with by other writers (e.g. Kowaleski-Wallace 1997).

Gaimster and Nenk (1997) have emphasised the importance of European pottery in the transformation of the English ceramic industry between 1450 and 1550 and have attempted to highlight what they see as the chief characteristics of the period:

... the expanding role for ceramics in English homes cannot be explained by permissive factors alone, such as advances in manufacturing techniques or modes of production. Rather a full understanding of the transformation of the English ceramic market after c. 1450 must be sought in the changing social pressures and motivations of the period (1997:171-2)

The preferred explanation for this ‘transformation’ again leans heavily on the influence of imported pottery and on the impulse amongst the socially ambitious mercantile and
artisan classes to emulate the practices of the aristocracy, using ceramic substitutes for expensive metal and glass objects.
To some extent this is a useful discussion and makes a good deal of sense. Processes of emulation, imitation and a growth in the consumption of luxuries are already well established as topics of importance in relation to social changes in the 18th century (Brewer and Porter 1993, Berg and Clifford 1999). When looked at in greater detail, however, a number of problems emerge with extending this approach back into the 16th and 17th centuries, particularly when considering the situation in the north midlands and the north of England. I shall return to these points below.

In partial contrast to Gaimster’s concentration on the import of European goods as evidence of cosmopolitanism and increasing sophistication, Joan Thirsk (1978) has drawn attention to the extent to which the import of luxury goods was considered an economic problem by the ruling class of the early 16th century. She has described the economic problems caused by the drain of bullion from England to the continent to pay for consumer goods. The imbalance of trade was the cause of considerable concern to those who managed the affairs of the Tudor state and resulted in semi-official support for a wide range of manufacturing projects concerned with the production and marketing of goods such as knitted stockings and caps, felt hats, iron cooking pots and pans, knives, pins, needles, gloves, pottery and copper wares as well as the production of raw materials and agricultural products. Although in time projects and projectors came to be associated with the questionable activities of confidence tricksters and the selling of ‘get-rich-quick’ schemes to the unwary, it seems that for much of the middle and later 16th century such projects were an important part of national economic policy and were supported by those who saw them as a way of both strengthening the domestic economy, limiting the outflow of bullion and providing employment for those affected by the economic problems affecting the major towns. Although textiles (the New Draperies) and related products (notably dyes and their constituents) play an important part in Thirsk’s account, she does not neglect other goods and is particularly concerned to stress the very wide range of consumer goods which were being
imported from Europe and which were subsequently replaced by locally manufactured goods. In spite of problems on the legal margins of the projects, the development of the indigenous manufacture of consumer goods appears to have been successful and a growing export trade developed between 1660 and 1700.

From the point of view of ceramics, Thirsk’s account is both interesting and frustrating; potters are mentioned only in passing, although they were in an excellent position to turn to the imitation of continental prototypes and the provision of new styles and types of vessels. As Gaimster’s accounts show, this appears to have happened in London and the south-east and the eventual development of Tin Glazed Earthenwares and English Stonewares in the later 16th and 17th centuries respectively shows that attempts to produce the more technically complex wares were eventually successful. Like Gaimster and Nenk, Kenneth Barton (1992), has noted the appearance of cups and cup-like vessels and the fact that they have counterparts in Europe. Barton’s discussion is somewhat more wide ranging than Gaimster’s and opens up the possibility of regional diversity within the broader tradition, with Tudor Greenwares dominant in the south and Tudor Brownwares (Cistercian and Blackware) more common in the north of England. He concludes:

This sudden influx of small wide mouthed vessels, whether as imports from Raeren, Langewehe, Siegburg, Schinvel, Beauvais, Surrey or Coventry is not by accident of trade or due to the vagaries of fashion. There is substantial evidence for complete change in domestic habits throughout Europe from the end of the 13th century. In the field of pottery studies this is most apparent in England in the increase in the use of bunghole-pitchers where they become commonplace in the meanest of dwellings by the end of the 13th century. They appeared in the south-east of England at this time and in the North in the late 15th century (1992:254)

The subsequent suggestion that change in vessel type was related to efforts to reduce contamination in drinking water and cross-infection between individuals are somewhat too functionalist in character to be entirely credible and fail to take account of theories regarding the
transmission of disease current at the time. Gaimster’s
more general explanation of a wider change in domestic
habits and the greater emphasis on individuality is perhaps
more economical in its applicability, but, as noted above,
has its own problems.
Taken together, these accounts appear to give a picture of
a transformation of the pottery traditions of medieval
England driven by an increasing desire on the part of
smaller merchants, ambitious yeomen and skilled
craftsmen to emulate the upper classes by obtaining goods
which would allow them to eat and drink according to the
new fashions which originated in London and, from there,
spread out over the whole country. At first glance this
would seem to fit in with the general transformation of
medieval England and the genealogical origins of the later
Georgian Order (Johnson 1996).

In terms of the perception and consumption of ceramics,
cups and similar ceramic tablewares seem to represent a
new item in the material culture repertoire; items designed
to replace vessels previously made of wood or other
perishable substances. Whether these vessels represented
the beginnings of a style of dining with the emphasis on
the individual is perhaps less clear than it might appear.
Unlike forks, which did not come into common use before
the end of the 17th century (Gaimster 1994:299-300),
Cistercian ware cups, beakers and other small vessels are
commonly found on archaeological sites of all types
within the study area from the later 15th century onwards,
along with other variants such a lobed cups, produced in
traditional fabrics and colours, suggesting that the habit of
drinking from ceramic vessels spread relatively rapidly
throughout society during the last decades of the 15th
century and the first few years of the 16th century. The
multiple handles on both Cistercian ware and Blackware
vessels can be seen as well adapted to the practice of
passing cups from person to person and thus to a
maintenance of the traditional dining practices (Barker
pers. comm.). The new ceramic tradition continued into
the later 17th century; the shapes of the vessels changed
and the technical characteristics altered, but the
typological distinctions between, for example, Cistercian
and Blackwares are relatively minor. In the early 18th
century the whole tradition was swept away with the rise
of the Georgian Order; in ceramic terms the appearance of
white salt-glazed stonewares and exotic porcelain and the
rise of the formalised drinking of tea and coffee in both public and private contexts.

The problem with the traditional account is that the archaeological evidence from the north Midlands and northern England points to a significantly earlier transformation of pottery styles than is apparent in other aspects of material culture. Equally significantly it is earlier than the ‘civilising process’ of the 16th century discussed by Norbert Elias and echoed by Gaimster and others. In his wide ranging survey, Johnson (1996) has drawn attention to the transformation of English society and the ways in which material culture was centrally involved in this process. Close scrutiny of the examples discussed by Johnson shows that he is dealing principally with the mid to late 16th and 17th centuries and that his discussion of ceramics draws principally on that of Gaimster (1994). Thus, although he provides a sophisticated theoretical framework for considering post-medieval society and social change, there remain methodological problems of chronology and chronological priority, particularly where the pottery is concerned. This problem is not by any means limited to Johnson’s work. A brief survey of the historical literature dealing with the early modern period shows that the focus of attention is on the later 17th and 18th centuries, with consideration of the late 15th and 16th centuries seemingly concerned principally with the debate over the evidence for crises in the towns and the problems affecting the traditional industries such as textiles. I am not about to assert that all such work is fundamentally flawed because it neglects one part of the archaeological record and there are important exceptions to this picture, notably Dyer’s discussion of the antecedents of later economic changes in the ‘long’ 13th century, c. 1180 – 1310 (1997:62-3) and Courtney’s review of the medieval – post-medieval transition (1997). On the other hand, the established account cannot be fully accepted if it fails to explain the archaeological evidence. There is a need to examine the later medieval and post-medieval periods on their own terms, before notions of emulation and the spread of a ‘civilising’ tradition from Europe can be fully accepted.

Before examining the archaeological data in detail, two other general explanations for the changes in ceramics
must be considered. These are technological change and changes in fashion.

▲ Technological change

The later medieval period was certainly one in which technological change took place. The use of multi-flued kilns enabled potters to increase firing temperatures, to build larger kilns (and thus increase their output) and perhaps to increase the use of coal as a fuel (McCarthy and Brooks 1988:80, Musty 1974; although coal was already in use in the medieval period in some potteries such as Burley Hill near Derby; (Hughes 1957). The documentation of these changes does not, however, explain why they took place or whether they actually had any effect on the colour or style of the vessels manufactured. Indeed, as regards the latter point, some of these developments had already occurred by the later medieval period without any corresponding changes in ware types. Multi-flued kilns were certainly employed to produce Cistercian and Blackwares at Wrenthorpe (Moorhouse and Roberts 1992:Figures 20, 21, 23, 26), but similar types of kiln were already in use in the earlier 15th century at Holme-upon-Spalding Moor where they were used to manufacture traditional types of Humberware (Mayes and Hayfield 1980:Figure 2.). At Toynton All Saints five kilns dating to between the late 13th and 16th centuries were all of the multi-flued type and were used to fire medieval style wares throughout this period (Healey 1994, Watkins 1987). In his discussion of the distribution of the various kiln types, Musty has characterised such kilns as a Yorkshire type the use of which spread throughout the Midlands (1974:50). Although based on a survey carried out nearly thirty years ago, this implies that, while potters were able to exploit the multi-flued kiln design as an aid to the production of Cistercian, Yellow and Black wares (through the use of saggars in the case of Cistercian and Blackware for example), the kiln technology was well established and did not, in itself, have any significant effect on the types of pots which were being manufactured. Rather, the potters were able to use the technology to obtain the outcomes which they desired, as they had been able to do for the previous few centuries (Cumberpatch 1997). Kiln design and technology generally, while significant, was essentially permissive rather than deterministic in its effect on pottery
styles (Gaimster and Nenk 1997:171-2).

The most significant technological change is the use of saggars which, while they permitted the production of vessels such as the Cistercian and Blackware cups and tygs, must also have limited the capacity of kilns by taking up far more space than demanded by the vessel which they contained. This might imply that the value of the vessels was greater or that the kilns were substantially larger. Even if the latter was the case, the consumption of fuel would still represent an increased cost for the potter. Given the very low value of pottery in the medieval period, it seems unlikely that such increased costs could have been born without an increase in the value of the product.

Excavated kilns of later 15th and 16th century date are rare in Yorkshire. The Humberware kiln at Holme upon Spalding Moor appears to have measured approximately 2m in diameter (Mayes and Hayfield 1980; 99-100) and is compared in the report with the West Cowick kilns (2.7 and 2.85m). In contrast a kiln at Wrenthorpe is reported to have measured only 1.65m in diameter. The three kilns found at Site 2, Wrenthorpe measured between 2.00m and 2.40m in diameter (Moorhouse and Roberts 1992:Table 7). Although such measurements may be a poor guide to the actual capacity of the kilns, there does not seem to have been any great difference in either size or structure between those kilns used for firing traditional medieval style vessels and those used for firing small vessels contained either in saggars or larger vessels.

**Fashion**

Fashion, as an explanation for change, is a more complex argument to refute than that of technological determinism, principally because it is so often invoked as a kind of commonsense explanation for stylistic change in material culture. The very concept of fashion is a curious one. Lying astride the domains of consumption, *habitus* and of the constitution and presentation of the self, the concept alone is not one with any explanatory power *per se*, but rather one which must be analysed in the context of wider historical changes in society and the economic structures of societies at particular moments (where economic structures are defined in the terms which I have set out
elsewhere; Cumberpatch 1998a). It is clear that presentation of the self through the medium of material culture was of great significance in later medieval and early post-medieval society (Banner 1992, Johnson 1996, Cumberpatch 1997, Entwistle 2000) and the evidence of sumptuary laws points to the great seriousness with which such issues were viewed (Hunt 1996, Cumberpatch 1997:127). In the contemporary world those concerned with fashion have noted how, even in a socio-economic context dominated by the power of international capital, changes in clothing fashions and body adornment may arise outside the structures dominated by major textile and clothing manufacturers, even while these commercial forces may swiftly appropriate the material, and even the metaphors, of such movements (cf. Polhemus 1994, Polhemus and Randall 1994:58-61, Steele 1996, Sahlins 1976:chapter 4). Given the historical and contextual contingency of fashion statements and the complexity of practices of consumption, it is inadequate simply to say, as some have done, that a particular change in material culture style is explicable as ‘fashion’. The term itself must be rendered problematical and contextually situated interpretations of the observed ‘fashionable’ phenomena sought. In the case of late medieval and early post-medieval society we must ask why there appears to have been a wholesale change in the ceramic repertoire, not simply in terms of vessel form, but, as will be demonstrated below, of the form, colour and texture of pottery vessels. The medieval tradition was replaced by one which was not only radically different, but also had its own internal structures and practical logic. If the term 'fashion' is to be applied with any rigour then it must be defined and justified in ways which take account of the complexities of the situation in late 15th and 16th century society, rather than simply being invoked as an explanation in its own right. Unfortunately the discussion of changes in material culture and the significance of fashion, emulation, imitation and novelty has tended to focus primarily on the later 17th and 18th centuries (e.g. Brewer and Porter 1993, Bermingham and Porter 1995, Berg and Clifford 1999), at the expense of the later 15th and 16th centuries. This concentration on the early modern period appears to have distracted attention from the equally radical transformations of the later medieval and post-medieval period, making the interpretation of
change in one relatively minor aspect (pottery) difficult.

Pottery in Yorkshire c1450 - 1700

Around 1400 the material culture repertoire of households in Yorkshire (and northern England generally) is recognisable to archaeologists as medieval in character. The ceramic assemblages are dominated by green glazed table wares (particularly jugs, but also pipkins, dripping pans, curfews, candlesticks and other vessels) and gritty ware utilitarian vessels, including cooking and storage pots, cisterns and jars. The demand for ceramic cooking pots was apparently declining rapidly, apparently in the face of an increased availability of metal vessels (Moorhouse 1978, Le Patourel 1979, Watkins 1987, Hayfield 1988, Cumberpatch 1997).

During the later 15th century and into the 16th century a number of changes took place within the ceramic assemblages and it is these which form the probably earlier northern component of Gaimster’s ceramic revolution and which require interpretation in terms of other, contemporary, changes in social practice. These changes have been alluded to above and can be summarised as follows:

- The appearance and rise in popularity of dark (brown, purple and black) glazed wares in the later 15th and 16th centuries.
- The appearance and rise in popularity of yellow glazed wares, also in the later 15th and 16th centuries.
- The appearance of new vessel forms, in the wares listed above, particularly single and multi-handled cups, mugs and beakers, jars and bowls, but also vessels associated with food preparation including pancheons and large open bowls.
- The apparent change in the use of glaze from a purely decorative device to one with both utilitarian and decorative functions.
- The appearance and rise in popularity of decorated slipwares (notably flatwares) in the 17th century.
In very general terms these changes can be correlated with those in southern England described by Gaimster and Nenk (1997:178). Equally they can be seen to relate in some way to the economic policies described by Thirsk (1978). Crucially however, they predate the period of state sponsored economic projects, implying that the economic phenomena described by Thirsk actually followed an earlier change in attitudes and practices which was, at least partially, manifested in terms of material culture consumption and production. Such a change was perhaps reflected in the increasing volume of imported goods and in the production of new varieties of pottery. A similar chronological problem besets Matthew Johnson’s account of the period (1996). Moreover, neither Thirsk, Johnson or Gaimster and Nenk actually explain the form of the changes seen in post-medieval pottery. While Thirsk provides a socio-political context for understanding changes in the pottery industry during the Tudor period and Gaimster offers a contextual analysis of the situation in south-east England (and specifically London), no concrete explanation exists for the five changes in the pottery industry in the north of England, listed above.

Gaimster’s invocation of the imitation of European forms follows a long tradition in archaeology of seeing the emulation of the foreign as an almost inevitable process. While there is some evidence of imitation within the southern English Border Ware industry (Gaimster and Nenk 1997:Figure 13.4, Pearce 1992:Plate 2), the situation in northern England appears to be rather different with very few vessels copying Rhenish forms. There is, at present, no definite evidence to suggest that foreign potters were responsible for the transformation of the products of the pottery industry in northern England. Indeed certain technical traits, like patterns of glazing, methods of applying handles and the shape of handle, strongly suggest continuity with earlier methods of production, particularly of the larger utilitarian vessels (Cumberpatch 1996:64, 2002). The attempt to link Cistercian wares and Blackwares with the chronologically parallel, but phenomenologically different, changes in the south-east (Gaimster and Nenk 1997) is ultimately unconvincing largely because they have not attempted to deal with the specific details of the case but have, as so often in archaeology, seen the northern two-thirds of the country as dependent upon the southeastern third (cf.

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Cumberpatch and Robbins 1995, Robbins 1999). A parallel suggestion, that the iron and steel trades of Hallamshire were transformed by an influx of French, specifically Huguenot, craftsmen, has been shown to be fallacious (Hey 1990) and there seems no evidence to support assumptions that there was any necessary European involvement in the transformation of either craft traditions or domestic practice which had causal influences on the pottery industry.

The rise of purple, brown and black glazed utilitarian wares

During the 15th century, while established medieval ceramic coarse and utilitarian ware types persisted, new utilitarian wares, including purple glazed wares began to make their appearance. Midlands Purple, a generic term for a ware which was probably manufactured at a number of centres (Cumberpatch 1996), has been found on sites in the central Midlands from the latter part of the 14th century onwards (Ford 1992, 1995:21) but does not seem to have made an impact in North Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire until the 15th century (e.g. Woodland 1993:40). A locally manufactured variant, Purple Glazed Humberware, made its first appearance in Hull in the later 15th century (Watkins 1987). Although the dating of the South Yorkshire Gritty wares (manufactured in the Lower Don Valley) is far from clear, it seems that a move from white fabrics with green or yellow-green glaze (Coal Measures White ware) to darker, reduced fabrics and purple glazes (Coal Measures Purple ware) also occurred during the 15th century (Hayfield and Buckland 1989).

Although some green glazed wares remained in production into the 17th and even the 18th century (Green Glazed Coarseware for example; Watkins 1987:106), it seems that there was a general tendency for the medieval types to be replaced by the Purple wares, which themselves later gave way to Brown Glazed Coarsewares, (sometimes known as redware), the ubiquitous utilitarian ware of the later 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. The vessel forms show considerable continuity from the earlier period with storage jars, cisterns and large jugs all common. The descendants of the later Brown Glazed Coarseware types, like open bowls, cooking vessels and
large pancheons, may still be recognised amongst mass-produced kitchen wares today, where they are designed to evoke an idealised domestic past.

The appearance of purple glazed pottery, frequently on reduced bodies, despite being described in numerous pottery reports has rarely been seen for what it is: a significant change in the phenomenological character of domestic material culture. Its appearance has not been widely recognised as a problem requiring theorisation and explanation. The significance of its appearance is two-fold: firstly the increasing popularity of the new type of pottery represents a major change in a tradition which had persisted since the mid 11th century and, secondly, this change in the character of utilitarian wares foreshadows one aspect of the later changes in tablewares.

In terms of manufacturing technique, these vessels, together with the slightly later Brown Glazed Coarsewares, are distinguished from medieval types by their fabrics and glaze colours, but, as noted above, other aspects show considerable continuity with earlier practices. Comparison of the handles of early Brown Glazed Coarsewares with those of Humberware jugs shows not only similarities in shape, but also of the pattern of glazing (Cumberpatch 1996:64, 2002) which might suggest that the potters were consciously adapting their techniques to their customers’ requirements, while retaining elements of their traditional manufacturing methods. One effect of the common practice in archaeology of having medieval pottery reports written by one author and post-medieval reports written by another is that such elements of continuity have been overlooked while the more obvious distinctions have been emphasised.

**Cistercian ware and Blackware**

The emergence of Cistercian ware in the latter part of the 15th century represents one of the most significant developments in the use of pottery vessels since the emergence of the medieval tradition in the 11th century. Cistercian wares were manufactured at a number of centres, notably Wrenthorpe in West Yorkshire and Ticknall in Derbyshire but also elsewhere, and typically have a fine dark red to purple fabric with thick brown to
near-black glaze internally and externally (Moorhouse and Slowikowski 1992:91). The evidence suggests that both Cistercian wares and the later Blackwares were fired in saggars (initially often larger vessels such as cisterns) in multi-flued kilns. A proportion of the earlier Cistercian wares were decorated with white pipeclay elements, normally abstract, but including stags heads and other naturalistic motifs. This appears to have ceased during the 16th century and Blackwares, at least from Wrenthorpe, are undecorated.

Regarding the origin of the new style, Peter Brears has pointed out that:

Little is known regarding their origins since they appeared suddenly in a fully established form, having little in common with either the native English tradition or those of contemporary continental countries (Brears 1983:215).

Elsewhere he has noted that the tradition has no known antecedents and appears, north of a line running from London to Bristol, in a fully formed state (Brears 1971:18).

A small number of copies of German stoneware vessels have been recorded from Wrenthorpe (Moorhouse and Slowikowski 1992:85, Figure 58:136), but these are insignificant in relation to the much larger numbers of unique local forms which pursue their own individual line of development from small rounded cups, often with flared rims, to tall cups and tygs, some of them of considerable size. There is no evidence that either the inception or the subsequent development of Cistercian wares and Blackwares owes anything of significance to European prototypes and the examples referred to seem to be more curiosities than a significant part of the potter's repertoire.

In a technical sense Cistercian wares represent an increase in complexity from medieval practices in terms of the use of very fine clays and of saggars. In terms of form and colour they represent a complete break with the medieval tradition in the area. With the exception of the so-called Skipton-on-Swale or Humberware drinking jugs, a form which is, in fact, of undetermined function and wholly different in character to the Cistercian wares (Jennings
ceramic drinking vessels are rare within the medieval tradition. Whereas traditional medieval functional types such as jugs and pitchers are found in the Purple Glazed fabrics together with later medieval forms such as bung-hole cisterns and glazed jars, the Cistercian wares and Blackwares may be representative of new drinking habits and, perhaps, of new patterns of social behaviour.

When compared with Border wares, certain similarities can be seen (the early small, round-bodied mugs for example), but equally other types of vessel have no direct parallels, notably the tall cups and large tygs which are a classic Blackware type and the Border ware ‘drinking jugs’ (Pearce 1992). While similar general trends might be detectable in both traditions, the specific responses of the potters (presumably approved by their customers) vary, and to suggest that the south-east should take priority over the north Midlands is clearly an invalid supposition.

\section*{Yellow wares and Yellow Glazed Coarsewares}

In a development which runs parallel to that of the Cistercian and Blackwares, a range of vessels were manufactured in off-white and buff fabrics with clear glaze giving the vessels a bright lemon yellow colour. Although a distinction has been drawn between Early Yellow and Yellow wares, the two can be difficult to distinguish and they should be considered as essentially chronological variants of the same type (as is also the case with Cistercian ware and Blackware). We can, in addition, make a distinction between ‘true’ yellow wares, such as were excavated at Wrenthorpe near Wakefield, and Yellow Glazed Coarsewares; vessels with somewhat coarser fabrics, often red or orange in colour, which were given a coating of white slip internally prior to glazing to produce a bright yellow finish similar to the yellow wares. These seem to be somewhat later in date then the Yellow wares and appear to be the counterparts of the Brown Glazed Coarsewares of the later 16th and 17th centuries (Cumberpatch 2002).

Unlike the dark coloured wares, the Early Yellow wares do not appear to have been designed for use as drinking
vessels or tableware. Bowls are the commonest form found at both Wrenthorpe and at Pontefract Castle, with jars, albarellos, chafing dishes and pipkins present in smaller quantities. This range of forms is maintained into the period of the Yellow wares, bowls and jars again being the commonest forms with very small numbers of albarellos, lids, pipkins, bottles and occasional cups being found at Wrenthorpe and Pontefract. The typical Yellow Glazed Coarseware vessel is the wide pancheon, a form also found in both locally made and imported Redware. The sizes of these vessels vary and, to date, no attempt has yet been made to assess whether there are size classes within assemblages which might relate to different functions.

Overall, the various types of yellow ware appear to have been designed for purposes other than those for which Cistercian and Blackwares were designed, perhaps more related to the processing and preparation of food. In this they would seem to have some connection with Redwares and certain types of Brown Glazed Coarsewares.

### Redware

The term Redware is one which has been applied to a variety of types of pottery, including the Brown Glazed Coarsewares described above. It is used here to describe vessels manufactured in light red or orange firing clays with clear slip giving a bright orange finish. Pancheons and bowls were often given a coating of a darker red slip externally. In South and West Yorkshire the Redwares are distinguishable from Brown Glazed Coarsewares principally by their fabrics, a distinction which is reinforced by the range of forms produced; redwares being principally chiefly pancheons and bowls with smaller numbers of jars (Cumberpatch 2002). The fabrics are closely similar to the commonest type of 17th century Slipware, type 1 as defined at Bawtry (Cumberpatch 1996:65), which is found widely throughout South and West Yorkshire. The similarity of such vessels to those manufactured in the Low Countries (Low Countries Redware) has been commented on by a number of authors, including Jennings (1981) and Ellison (1981), but the examples from the study area are notable for the absence of such distinctively European features as frying pan / skillet handles and forms such as the distinctive...
double, loop-handled tripod cooking pots. This would seem to suggest that, if the redwares were intended to evoke associations with imported vessels, then the evocation was through the colour and texture rather than through the specific form. In addition it should be noted that, whereas imported cooking pots are common in ports such as Hull and Newcastle, the quantities found on sites further inland are low, paralleling the situation with regard to Rhenish stonewares and other imported vessel types. The wider significance of this pattern, both in terms of the perception and valuing of pottery and in terms of the economic structures which produced it, requires further, more detailed, work.

### European pottery in northern England

In general terms the range of European wares found on sites in northern England is similar to that in the south-east. Ports such as Hull, Newcastle and Bawtry have produced a wide range of European types dating to the medieval and post-medieval periods and the surviving documents record the presence of European merchants in these and other coastal towns, all of which played an important role in the export of textiles, lead, coal and other products (Britnell 1997). Equally, pottery was exported from England to the continent, particularly to Scandinavia during the medieval period (Reed 1994, Vince 1995). The significance of the various imports as components of the ceramic assemblages varies. Inland sites, such as Pontefract Castle, have produced only small quantities of imported wares (see also Le Patourel 1973:99 for a discussion of moated sites), while at coastal sites, principally ports, it appears that imported pottery made a substantial contribution to the local ceramic repertoire. In Newcastle, for example, tripod cooking pots in Low Countries Redware appear to have replaced the local cooking pots by the beginning of the 15th century (Ellison 1981:130). In partial contrast to this, sites in Hull, while yielding substantial quantities of imported wares, also produce large quantities of locally manufactured and other English types, suggesting, perhaps, that there is no simple relationship between access to imported material and its use.

The vessel and ware types which Gaimster has described as being most influential on the southern English
industries, Rhenish stonewares and Tin Glazed Earthenwares, are certainly present in northern England (Ellison 1981, Watkins 1987, 1993, Cumberpatch 1996, 2002) but, as noted above, their distinctive forms seem to have had little influence on the developments represented by locally produced wares, as discussed above. At a more general level, the concentration of imported wares in the ports and coastal towns seems to argue against a widespread desire to obtain either original imports or local copies. The inland market for imported pottery was clearly limited and it seems unlikely, given the cheapness of pottery generally, that the scarcity of such vessels was due to their price. If the originals were in limited demand only, then there seems no reason for potters to have sought to imitate them in terms of either colour or style. In the light of this, and together with the absence of evidence for large scale copying, the argument for significant continental influence loses much of whatever power it once had. I would argue that the evidence points to an essentially indigenous and locally inspired shift in perceptions of what was significant about pottery, a shift which resulted in the wholesale changes described above. At present, the nature and source of this change in perceptions remains obscure, hence the focus on critique in this paper, and as such should constitute an important research goal for academic studies of pottery in the future.

A phenomenological approach to post-medieval pottery

If European pottery was not the source of inspiration for post-medieval pots, then questions arise concerning the origin of the forms, the colours and the textures as well as the reasons lying behind the rapid change from the medieval tradition to the radically different post-medieval tradition. As described above, there are considerable chronological problems involved in linking the changes observable in the pottery with changes in other aspects of society and the evidence available at present indicates that the changes in pottery took place somewhat in advance of other changes in society and material culture.

The following analysis of selected assemblages from South, West and East Yorkshire draws on the approach used elsewhere to analyse medieval assemblages
(Cumberpatch 1997) and is intended to establish the nature of the internal structures within post-medieval pottery assemblages. It is proposed that this represents a more logical starting point for the analysis of the social dimensions of change within the ceramic repertoire than does the assumption of the centrality of foreign influences on local production. It also seems necessary to establish the nature and extent of change in material culture more generally in the later 15th and 16th centuries as a preliminary to re-evaluating the chronology and scope of changes in material culture in the post-medieval period. Pottery, as the most abundant surviving component of the range of domestic hardware, seems an appropriate place to start.

Case study: Orgreave Hall, Rotherham, South Yorkshire

Orgreave Hall near Rotherham in South Yorkshire was the subject of a limited excavation and structural recording in advance of its demolition to make way for opencast coal mining (Cumberpatch 1998b, Latham unpublished). The pottery assemblage consisted of post-medieval and modern elements with only a scatter of medieval material. The modern material (19th and 20th century in date) has been omitted from this analysis in order to focus on the later 16th and 17th century pottery. A few sherds of early 18th century wares suggested that the assemblage had been created in the first quarter of the 18th century, perhaps as a result of the deliberate disposal of wares no longer deemed socially acceptable (cf. Gooder 1984, Johnson 1996).

In Table 1 the post-medieval material has been listed by vessel form with the unidentifiable body sherds omitted. Although the numbers of identifiable vessels are low, there appears to be some structuring visible within the assemblage. 16th and 17th century cups and mugs are found only in Cistercian ware and Blackware fabrics (the Manganese Mottled ware and Stoneware vessels are of 18th century date) while jars, cisterns and jars/jugs are found preferentially in Brown Glazed Coarsewares, Midlands Purple wares and, in smaller numbers, in Redware. In contrast, open vessels, like plates, bowls, pancheons and unidentified 'open vessels', appear preferentially in Redware, Slipware and Yellow ware fabrics.
Case study: Pontefract Castle

Full details of the pottery from Pontefract Castle can be found elsewhere (Cumberpatch 2002, Archaeological Services WYAS 2002) and the data presented in Table 2 are simply a summary of the vessel forms from post-medieval contexts within the castle. None of these are later in date than 1649 and the majority were created when the castle was demolished in May and June of that year, following the end of the Civil War. The bulk of the pottery dates to the early to mid 17th century, with small quantities of 16th century material apparently representing vessels which had remained in use into the later period. The very low quantities of identifiable imported vessels are an accurate representation of the generally low quantities of these wares in the castle as a whole.

Broadly speaking it seems that there is an association between black and brown vessels and the storage, serving and consumption of liquids, with the late Humberwares perhaps marking some sort of legacy from medieval practices. The preparation and serving of food appears to be linked with lighter coloured wares, like Redware, Yellow ware and Slipware with some limited involvement of Brown Glazed Coarsewares. A further degree of blurring in the categories is caused by the vagueness of the category of jars which require further morphological study before meaningful divisions can be distinguished. Were this to be undertaken it seems probable that a more precise division of the groups would distinguish Yellow and Redwares from Brown Glazed Coarsewares and Blackwares.

Case study: Hull

Extensive excavations in Hull have produced large quantities of post-medieval pottery, including locally manufactured wares, regional imports and European wares. Selected material is presented in Tables 3 to 15. Inevitably there are problems with resiliency and these are reflected in the quantities of medieval types, including Humberware 1, Orange ware and Shell Tempered ware. These medieval types have not been omitted as they serve to highlight the contrast between the structure of the medieval assemblages and those of the post-medieval
period (see Cumberpatch 1997 for further discussion). The data are based upon the numbers of sherds identifiable to ware type and form. Those types represented by unidentifiable body sherds have been included under the category of "Other". The actual range of types on each site was thus somewhat wider than is indicated in the summary tables. Full details can be found in the reports from which the data were taken (Watkins 1987, 1993).

The initial distinction visible in the tables is the apparent preference for cooking vessels (frying pans, skillets and pipkins) in Low Countries Red ware and a corresponding preference for cups and tygs in Cistercian ware, which are somewhat commoner than the imported stoneware mugs. Jars appear preferentially in Brown Glazed Coarseware, as do bowls and dishes, although it is not clear to what extent these latter vessels might be defined as redwares according the criteria used at Pontefract Castle and Orgreave Hall. Late Humberwares, notably type 4 (purple glazed) and 5 (Green Glazed Coarseware) seem to have been preferred for jars, cisterns and, to some extent, jugs and bowls. In this respect they may be seen as fulfilling some of the roles of the Brown Glazed Coarsewares and the relationship between the older, green glazed, tradition (represented by Humberware 5) and the new (Purple Glazed Humberware and Brown Glazed Coarseware) is one which requires further and more detailed investigation. The presence of Saintonge ware jugs is also notable, as it was at the inland port of Bawtry (Cumberpatch 1996). Tablewares, notably chafing dishes, appear in a variety of fabrics and a closer study of such categories of object, across a number of different types of site, might prove of considerable interest. At present we lack the kind of fine grained analysis required to understand the details of the relationships between similar types of vessels from different sources.

Discussion

The figures from the three case studies are hardly conclusive, but the indications of structures within the assemblages are regular enough to indicate that they represent something more than chance. As ever in archaeology, further work is required on large groups of material before the finer details of the distinctions can be resolved, but it is already clear that there is a change in
everyday social practice, reflected in the pottery, which requires close attention if we are to interpret it convincingly. Greater standardisation in terminology and definition, particularly within the Brown Glazed Coarseware and Redware categories, is also required in order to permit the drawing of effective comparisons between assemblages. It will also be necessary to address issues of regional diversity and distinction. The evidence presented in this paper demonstrates that there are significant differences in the situation in the south-east and in the north Midlands. It is unclear whether this distinction masks other, finer differences between regions, or what the geographical extent of such regions may be. Clearly it is impossible to accept a mere statement of ‘regionalism’ as an explanation without seeking the causes of such diversity.

Acknowledging these caveats, it is possible to suggest a number of directions in which future analyses could move. These include:

- The significance of the changes in the colours used for pots
- The significance of the changes in vessel forms from the standardised range typical of the medieval period
- The relationship between pottery and other classes of material culture
- The relationship between social changes (at the levels of both structure and practice) and changes in material culture
- The consideration of a longer timescale (c.1485 – 1750) within which a series of changes took place and which can be considered as forming part of the genealogy of the Georgian order which typifies the 18th century.
- The significance and source of regional variation in ceramics and the extent of the broad north – south-east divide described above

Once these issues have been tackled, we may be able to begin to move towards a synthesis of archaeological and socio-economic historical approaches to the later medieval
to post-medieval period.

### Conclusion

Writing of the situation between the mid 17th and early 19th centuries, Berg and Clifford have commented:

Questions of novelty, imitation, value and taste arise in a preoccupation over the period with the middling ranks. Was their response to the market, objects of possession and display, fashion and luxury an emulation of a pre-existing culture amongst the elites? We suspect, or in some cases even know, that this was not the case. But we know very little about the inducements to consumer culture amongst these variegated and intensely status conscious groups. Our once fixed categories of a resistant, customary plebeian culture have broken down. Assumptions of an emulative bourgeois culture leading the way to modern mass consumerism are no longer satisfactory (1999:2).

This suggestion that the explanations for change popular amongst archaeologists working with data from the later medieval and post-medieval periods are being questioned, albeit in the context of somewhat later developments, raises a number of important issues for archaeology, some of which have been outlined above. The purpose of this article has been to focus attention on the hitherto neglected subject of the transformation in tradition which is represented by the appearance of post-medieval pottery types in Yorkshire and elsewhere. The intention has been to define the scope of the problem, to highlight the inadequacies of the existing explanations and to indicate a possible way forward which involves considering the phenomenological change in ceramics as a significant aspect of wider social change. Above all it is clear that a broader approach to ceramics, which situates them within the realm of material culture generally and connects this with larger social structures, is required if the reasons for the changes are to be interpreted and adequately explained.

The recent flurry of work on consumption within historical studies appears, as noted above, to have taken as its principle focus the period from the early/mid 17th century onwards, with Joan Thirsk's work (1978) being
the principal exception. No doubt there are very good reasons for this; the 17th century saw significant changes in politics, society and the economy and was followed by major changes in the ceramic repertoire and other changes in material culture during the early 18th century (Brewer and Porter 1993, Berg and Clifford 1999). As this review, together with others, cited above, has pointed out, the later 15th and early 16th centuries also saw significant changes in practice and in the material culture involved in practice. Is it unreasonable to suggest that the greater richness of the documentary record dating from the 17th and 18th centuries has masked the importance of changes which took place somewhat earlier? Certainly the archaeology of the of the 15th and 16th centuries is rarely written in a way which is accessible to those trained in expressing themselves in the discourses of documentary-based history. Conversely, historical discourse rarely seems to address the questions of practice, structure and agency which are the core of an archaeological understanding of the practicalities of human existence. Thus, while we have a considerable amount of information about some aspects of 16th century society (towns, industry, fortifications and so on) the archaeology of day-to-day practice appears far less well understood, certainly in comparison to earlier and later periods.

Although American historical archaeology is often considered to be conceptually more sophisticated than that practised in Britain, it seems to have little to offer in this specific case. Anne Yentsch (1991) has described the ceramic assemblages of the later 17th and 18th centuries as divided into earth-toned and white-toned categories, related to male and female domains within and outside the household. In common with the discussions of post-medieval and early modern society referred to above, she has focussed on the later period (later 17th and 18th centuries) and contrasts a set of generic ‘medieval’ with early modern practices, effectively omitting the distinction made in Britain between the medieval and the post-medieval. Specifically, her ‘earth-toned’ vessel types are those which are of post-medieval character (Redware, Brown Glazed Coarseware, Purple Glazed wares) and which have been described above. Their persistence, alongside the new white-toned wares of the 18th century, requires analysis with reference to their history and genealogy as well as with their more immediate
contextual relationships. In addition, Yentsch’s approach, linking the various classes of pottery with male and female domains in a structuralist analysis which emphasises a simple male-female duality, is perhaps of questionable value as it seems likely that the majority of post-medieval pottery was connected with the domain of the household and thus, perhaps, with female labour, but also with shared space. The position of dark coloured 16th and 17th century tablewares (Cistercian ware, Black ware) is omitted, with serious consequences for the argument as a whole, at least as it is applied in an British context.

In contrast to this approach, I would argue that, from the later 15th century onwards, we can see a transformation in social practice which marks the emergence of a distinctively post-medieval social order, represented and naturalised by the use of a distinctive set of non-medieval material symbols, including the pottery under discussion here. The 18th century triumph of the Georgian order (Johnson 1996) appears to have obscured this phase and to have led to a neglect of the distinctive ceramic assemblages, in spite of their abundant survival in Dissolution and Civil War siege and demolition deposits.

There are clearly a number of factors at work during the later medieval period which were responsible for the appearance post-medieval pottery and to try to identify a single one is probably a futile and misconceived task. Rather we have to consider a number of factors which appear to have come together and resulted in a radical change in day-to-day practice. In addition to the recovery, analysis and full study of post-medieval pottery assemblages being accorded the same priority as that given to earlier periods, we also need to become far more aware of the significance of the attributes of material culture in relation to wider and deeper social structures and practices. When we have both larger datasets and a range of more sophisticated interpretative tools we will be able to contribute more effectively to debates over the significance of material culture in relation to both grand historical narratives and to investigate in detail the transformations in tradition which preceded the emergence of the European global empires, the modern world view and modern world order.
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