

Potters at Peddimore

Mike Hodder

Introduction

Sometime between 1213 and 1229, Thomas Newburgh, Earl of Warwick (lord of the manor of Sutton Coldfield), granted Thomas Arden the assart (land newly cleared for agricultural use) that Roger le Fleur enclosed in Peddimore, in length from the hedge Roger laid up to the enclosed wood (*hay*) of Osbert of Wishaw and in breadth between Roger's ditch alongside *fossetellos ollatorum* and the land Earl Waleran (father of Thomas Newburgh) gave to Thomas's father¹. The words "*ossetellos ollatorum*" are translated as "potters' sheds" by the editor of the document. *Ollatororum* is literally "of the pot or jar makers", but another, more likely translation of *fossetellos* is "small pits", which in this context would be clay pits, from which the potters dug their raw materials².

This is as yet the only evidence for pottery manufacture in Sutton Coldfield in the Middle Ages and it raises several questions: where exactly were these clay pits and adjoining workshops, drying sheds and kilns, and what traces are likely to remain?; what type of vessels were the potters making, why were they making pottery here, and how does it relate to other medieval pottery manufacture in the vicinity?



Pieces of a medieval cooking pot found in excavations at Castle Bromwich Castle

Location

Much assarting in the vicinity is recorded in the thirteenth century and the location of some of the pieces of land mentioned in 1240, to the north and east of Peddimore Hall and up to Ox Leys Road and the boundary with Wishaw parish, can be identified from nineteenth-century field names, but no recorded field names refer to potters or potting³.

The underlying geological formation in the area, Mercia Mudstone (formerly known as Keuper Marl) weathers to a clay from which pottery could be made. The clay is overlain in places by sandy pebbly drift and, south of Peddimore Hall, by alluvium up to 0.5m deep⁴. The pits dug by potters to extract the clay (the *fossetillos*) need not have been particularly deep. Several pits of different sizes that are marked on nineteenth-century maps of the area might include potters' clay pits but they could have been dug at various times to extract clay for other purposes other than pottery making, such as marling (spreading it over fields to improve water retention)⁵. Pottery kilns might be indicated by burnt clay on the surface of a ploughed field and can be detected through geophysical survey by magnetometer, because burning affects the soil's magnetism. Pottery manufacturing sites are also indicated by pieces of under-fired or over-fired pottery (wasters), often in large quantities, and fragments of kilns. Medieval pottery has been found in fieldwalking in the vicinity of Peddimore Hall but there are no obvious wasters or kiln fragments⁶. Remains of drying sheds and possible potters' dwellings are only likely to be found through excavation.

In addition to clay, the potters would need water, wood to fuel their kilns, and access to a route for the transporting the finished vessels either directly to their customers or to a market. Water was fairly easily obtainable: there are streams around Peddimore Hall, and the potters' clay pits and field ditches like that of Roger le Fleur would fill with and retain water because of the impermeable clay subsoil. Woodland in the vicinity included Osbert of Wishaw's *hay*, which was an enclosed wood probably managed as coppice, "the woods of Peddimore"⁷, and "Sutton woods", which are mentioned in the thirteenth century, but of course we do not know which areas of woodland the potters were actually able to use. Finished pots could be taken along nearby roads. Wishaw Lane, east of Peddimore Hall, led south to join Walmley Ash Lane towards Sutton Coldfield and continued through Minworth to Water Orton and beyond, across Kingsbury Road leading to Curdworth and further east. Bulls Lane, north of Peddimore Hall, was probably one of "the two great roads to Langley [Hall]" mentioned in 1240⁸. To the west it continued beyond Langley Hall across common land to Sutton Coldfield, and to the east it led to Over Green, which straddled the boundary between Sutton Coldfield and Wishaw parishes, and then further on to other parts of Wishaw.

Products and markets

The thirteenth-century potters at Peddimore would have been making cooking pots, storage jars, pitchers or jugs, the main forms of pottery in use at the time, in the locally-obtainable red clay derived from Mercia Mudstone. It contrasts with the iron-poor clays used to make "whiteware" vessels, as described below. As noted above, raw materials, fuel and potential transport routes were available at Peddimore, but the same could be said of other localities in the area. The potters would have been selling their wares at markets or perhaps to individual customers living in nearby settlements. The nearest medieval market was in Sutton Coldfield, where a market charter was granted in 1300 but the market may have originated in the early thirteenth century, when the town expanded through planned growth along High Street and the parish church was constructed,

extended or rebuilt⁹. Further afield, there were markets at Coleshill and Birmingham by the time the potters are mentioned, and there may have been other, informal markets in villages and hamlets such as Minworth and Over Green.

The most obvious medieval settlements in the Peddimore area now are the moated sites at Peddimore Hall itself, Langley Hall, Hermitage Farm and Pool Hall at Over Green, and Walmley Ash. Some of these are first mentioned later in the thirteenth century but by analogy with other moated sites they could have been established by or during the earlier thirteenth century, when the potters are mentioned. In addition, the hamlet at Over Green and individual farms whose sites are still occupied by existing dwellings could have been in existence at this time, together with other settlements which were subsequently abandoned later on, like that found at Shenstone on the M6 Toll¹⁰. It is surely no coincidence that the potters are mentioned at exactly the time that assarting was taking place and new settlements were established.

Other medieval potters and their products

The Peddimore potters were, however, not the only potters whose wares were available in the area in the thirteenth century. To the south, excavations have revealed evidence of medieval pottery production in the Bull Ring, Digbeth and Deritend in Birmingham city centre. These “Deritend Ware” potters made cooking pots and jugs mainly from the middle of the thirteenth century into the fourteenth century, but production started earlier in the thirteenth century and possibly in the twelfth century, therefore coinciding with the Peddimore potters. Cooking pots made further afield, in the Coventry area, from the middle of the twelfth to the middle of the thirteenth century (“Coventry -type ware”) have been found in Birmingham city centre and at sites near Peddimore, as noted below. Whitewares were made in south Staffordshire or north Warwickshire, somewhere between Lichfield and Coleshill, from the middle of the thirteenth to the fourteenth century, but no kilns have yet been located¹¹. To the north-east of Peddimore, *John le potter* is mentioned in Drayton Bassett in 1269¹².

Medieval pottery (but no wasters indicating kilns) has been found in fieldwalking and excavations in the vicinity of Peddimore. Pottery from fieldwalking, much of which was found around Wiggins Hill and Over Green, included Coventry-type cooking pots but it was dominated by whitewares dating from c1250 to c1400. In addition there was some Deritend ware, and pottery made at Chilvers Coton near Nuneaton in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries. Coventry-type cooking pots were found in excavations at Pool Hall in Over Green, and in excavations at Minworth Greaves and Wishaw Hall Farm whiteware was predominant and included bowls, jugs (some decorated with vertical strips of red slip), and cooking pots¹³. In the very few excavations in Sutton Coldfield town centre, Coventry-type ware of twelfth to thirteenth century date was found in a cobble surface in High Street¹⁴ and medieval pottery found at Coleshill Street included Coventry-type ware, Deritend ware of possible twelfth to thirteenth or fourteenth century date, and mudstone tempered ware like that found in Solihull¹⁵.

The Peddimore potters: finding a gap in the market but subsequently outshone?

The early thirteenth-century potters at Peddimore were probably operating on quite a small scale, serving customers in Sutton Coldfield and the rural area to its east, which included newly-established settlements associated with assarting. They were working during the early years of the “Deritend

ware” industry in Birmingham and at a time when local needs were also met by Coventry-type wares made some distance away. The products of the Peddimore potters would therefore have filled a gap in the local market. They were eclipsed by the middle of thirteenth century by “Deritend ware”, which included cooking pots and slip-decorated decorated jugs, and even more so by whitewares, which included a range of vessel forms.

¹ D Crouch ed (2015), *The Newburgh Earldom of Warwick and its charters 1088-1253*, *Dugdale Society Publications* 48, number 195.

² I am grateful to Professor Chris Dyer for this suggested translation and interpretation.

³ E Mason ed (1980), *The Beauchamp Cartulary Charters 1100-1268*, *Pipe Roll Society Publications* 81 (New Series 43, for 1971-73), numbers 301 to 303; Crouch, *Newburgh Earldom*; R Lea (2003), *The Story of Sutton Coldfield* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing), 27; M Hodder (1988), *The development of some aspects of settlement and land use in Sutton Chase*, (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, <http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/3607/1/Hodder88PhD.pdf>), 298-299 and fig 111; Sutton Coldfield Corn Rent map (1824-25 (Sutton Coldfield Library).

⁴ C Mould (1998), *An archaeological evaluation at Peddimore, Sutton Coldfield*. Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit Report 526 <https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-1959-1/dissemination/pdf/reports/0526.pdf>

⁵ For example, Sutton Coldfield Corn Rent Map.

⁶ M Hodder and T Jones (2017), Birmingham’s rural fringe: an archaeological survey of the Green Belt in Sutton Coldfield, 1994-99, *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society* 119 for 2016-17, 63-83.

⁷ W Dugdale(1656) *The Antiquities of Warwickshire* (London), 674

⁸ Beauchamp Charters 301; Hodder, *Settlement and land in Sutton Chase*, fig 111

⁹ Lea, *Story of Sutton Coldfield*, 31

¹⁰ Powell, A (2008), *Shenstone linear features (Site 13)*, in in Powell A B, Fitzpatrick A P and Crockett A D, *The Archaeology of the M6 Toll 2000-2003* (Salisbury: Oxford Wessex Archaeology monograph 2), 191-221.

¹¹ S Ratkai (2009), *The pottery*, in C Patrick and S Ratkai, *The Bull Ring Uncovered. Excavations at Edgbaston Street, Moor Street, Park Street and The Row, Birmingham, 1997-2001* (Oxford: Oxbow), 92-171; S Ratkai (2008), *The medieval pottery*, in Powell et al, *Archaeology of the M6 Toll*, 491-501.

¹² G Wrottesley ed (1883), *Plea Rolls, temp. Henry III. Suits affecting Staffordshire tenants*, *Staffordshire Historical Collections* 4 (1) 1883, 1-215, at 175.

¹³ S Ratkai, *Medieval and post-medieval pottery*, in Hodder and Jones, *Birmingham’s rural fringe*, 73-78; Hodder, *Settlement and land use in Sutton Chase*; M Hodder (1992), *The development of the north Warwickshire landscape: settlement and land use in the parishes of Wishaw and Middleton*, *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society* 97, 41-56.

¹⁴ C Hewitson (2004), *14-18 High Street, Sutton Coldfield, Birmingham. Archaeological excavations 2004*. Birmingham Archaeology PN1172 2004

<https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-502-1/dissemination/pdf/birmingh2-7905.pdf>

¹⁵ S Ratkai (2005), *Medieval pottery from 15-17 and 33 Coleshill Street*, pp 68-70 of C Malim, *Medieval and post-medieval structures at Coleshill Street, Sutton Coldfield*, *Transactions of the Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society* 109, 55-74.