

Barnet and District Record Society

BULLETIN

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A MEDIEVAL INDUSTRIAL SITE AT BARNET

A Report on the 1959 Excavations

IN November, 1959, David Dawson-Goodey found a complete medieval cooking-pot while digging in his father's garden at Dyke Cottage, King's Road, Barnet (TQ 51/233964). The discovery was immediately reported to Mr. F. N. Bath, O.B.E., the former owner of the house and now honorary curator of the Barnet Museum. A trial excavation was carried out on behalf of the Museum, where the finds have been deposited. Shallow hollows had been scraped in the natural sandy brickearth, probably for the raw material for potmaking. Subsequently the hollows had been covered with a dump of industrial waste — many pottery fragments, broken parts of a kiln, a few bones and some lumps of slag. Powdered charcoal was everywhere.

Barnet Common, before the enclosures of the eighteenth century, consisted of a narrow triangle of open land along the ridge west of the parish church. The northern boundary was a bank and ditch (now largely built over) known as Grim's Dyke. The county boundary follows old hedgelines north of Barnet, but suddenly swings south here to climb the ridge at its narrowest point. After following the crest westward for 200 yards, the boundary turns N.N.W. along Galley Lane. The north (that is, the Middlesex) side of the crest here was occupied by a leg-of-mutton shaped field, with a track on its north side. This track is now Grimsdyke Crescent; its eastern end was diverted when Dyke Cottage was built in 1924, but can still be traced crossing the lawn diagonally.

The pottery found was made from local clay, the coarser wares being tempered with fragments of flint and quartz, possibly from a deposit of boulder clay; water was available from nearby ponds. The clay was thrown on a wheel, and a wide variety of shapes and qualities were made. A roughened flint nodule, shaped like a human finger, may have been used as a modelling tool. After drying, the pots were stacked in the kiln, the supports being removable to make raking-out easier. These supports were clay bars (either cigar-shaped with a square cross-section, or flat and tapering) which bridged the space between the central pedestal and the kiln wall. Other firebars were found in an adjoining garden in 1920. A few burnt lumps of sandstone may have come from the kiln walls. The simple circular updraught kiln occurs in Romano-British times (for example, at Brockley Hill), but persisted into the medieval period.

The main forms of pottery found are shown in the accompanying drawing and are described in the appendix. None of the pottery, not even the better quality jugs, had been glazed. Some had burst in the firing, either by dunting (gas pressure in the clay blowing flakes off the surface) or by angular cracking due to uneven firing and differential expansion of the temper. One of the cooking-pots had a layer of grease inside, and several sherds had been scraped as if to clean them after use; five animal bones were found in the dump. Soot on other fragments may be due to cooking over an open fire, or merely to a dirty kiln, but it is evident that there was a mixture of pots spoilt in the firing and others broken in use.

A few of the sherds, with their laminated flint-filled fabric and coarse pimply surface, may be as early as the late twelfth century, while the one glazed sherd (7A) found on top of the dump need not be later than the early fourteenth century. The bulk of the material is generally comparable with that found at Rayleigh Castle, abandoned by 1277 (*Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, new series XII [1910-12], 147-85) and that from the Ashted kilnsite (*Surrey Archaeological Collections*, XLVII [1941], 58-66) attributed to the end of the thirteenth century. All the available evidence points to a thirteenth century date for the Dyke Cottage finds, possibly around a central date of 1250. A smith and a charcoal burner are mentioned in the Barnet Court Rolls of 1245 and 1253, respectively, and *Geoffrey Le Pottere* occurs in the Assize Roll of 1294. The iron slag, charcoal and kiln waste may be the results of their operations on the fringe of the newly-cleared woodland — fresh assarts are mentioned in the contemporary Court Rolls. Wood gives off steam on burning, so that charcoal is a better fuel for furnace and kiln. The Potter's Lane mentioned in 1247 need not refer to the present road of that name, two miles away.

Nearly a score of thirteenth-century kilnsites have been identified in S.E. England, and characteristic types of coarse pottery have been found between ten and twenty miles from their source. Finer quality wares were traded even further, and marketing areas must have varied with communications and other economic conditions. London is only eleven miles from the site, and several finds in the City suggest that it was a market for surplus products from the Barnet kiln. Tolls on charcoal and potters' ware were charged at Highgate in 1377 (probably goods going to London), but by the fifteenth century Barnet was using biconical pitchers of a type mass-produced at Cheam in Surrey.

The origin of Barnet is still obscure; the name is first recorded in 1197, while the market was chartered two years later. A road through the town existed by 1215-35 (see *Bulletin No. 7*), and the Court Rolls give evidence of a flourishing community from 1245 onwards. A domestic site (thirteenth century and later) has been identified half a mile south of the church (*Transactions of the East Herts Archaeological Society*, XIV [1955-57], 70-71). An industrial settlement like the Dyke Cottage site, with a large amount of waste products, offers unlimited scope for further research. Any conclusions based upon a small sample excavation must necessarily be tentative.

I am most grateful to Mr. R. F. Bayman, Mr. A. F. Longworth and Cr. P. F. M. Willis for hard digging; to Mr. G. C. Dunning and Mr. J. G. Hurst for examining and discussing the pottery; and to the entire Dawson-Goodey family for help in many ways.

D. F. RENN

Descriptions of the Pottery Illustrated

No attempt is made to give a complete catalogue of the finds here, but the account includes all the major varieties of pottery found, and also the most interesting individual sherds.

COOKING-POTS (at least 50 examples)

(1) Of smooth polished black ware with some flint temper. One example has a shallow ribbon roughly smudged into the neck — a Saxo-Norman technique (*Proc. Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, L [1957], 38-39, fig. 3, 10; fig. 4, 2-6) persisting into the thirteenth century (*Archæologia Cantiana*, LXI [1948], 37, fig. 17, 8).

(2) In fine grey clay, tempered with occasional flints. The smooth surface is broken by regular girth grooves and a shallow raised band on the neck, overlaid with vertical thumbed strips. This style of decoration is best known on the glazed tripod pitchers of the Oxford region (*Oxoniensia*, IV [1939], 98, fig. 22B; *Ibid.*, XXIII [1958], 53, fig. 19, BIB45).

(3) Very fine smooth brown ware, with internal beading to the rim, similar to others found with late thirteenth-century pottery at Rayleigh Castle and at King William Street, London (*Archæologia*, LXXXIII [1933], 129, fig. 14c2).

(4, 5) Complete profiles in reddish-brown ware with light grey core. The pots are rough-surfaced and have fine firing cracks, having warped in the kiln. (4) has pronounced rippling and a greasy scum inside the shoulder.

JAR

(6) Sandy yellow ware, derived from a Saxo-Norman type known at Leicester (*Society of Antiquaries Research Report*, XV [1948], 225, fig. 59, 6).

JUGS (about 30 examples)

(7) The majority are of sandy buff ware, with a small pinched-out lip for pouring. The handle is a thick rod of clay dowelled into the rim and luted against the bulge of the pot as shown. Rows of slashed holes helped the moisture to escape from the handle during firing, and were decorative as well. Fig. 7A shows a body sherd from another such jug, decorated with applied scales and covered with the remains of a brownish-black manganese glaze. This type is well known in the City (*British Museum Catalogue of English Pottery*, p. 63, fig. 50; *Antiquaries Journal*, XVII [1937], 415, fig. 1, 1; London Museum *Medieval Catalogue*, plate LXII 1).

(8) Some rims are sharply moulded and the handles are affixed somewhat lower. A complete jug of this type, with squat body and long cylindrical neck, was found in the late thirteenth century kilns at Rye (*Sussex Archaeological Collections*, LXXIV [1933], 60, plate XII 2).

LIDS (?)

Most handles are round in section, but two were flat and strap-like. (9) is in gritty black ware, decorated with slashed lines down the sides and narrow knife cuts. It lay close to the body of the vessel, and there was a perforation through both. (10) is a strap-handle with curled-up sides decorated with finger-pressings which must have stood up above the rim of the vessel. Flat lids with handles like these are known in northern England as well as the upper Thames Valley (*Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, new series LV [1956], 87, and references there cited), but a Saxo-Norman pitcher with a perforation at one end of the strap-handle has been found at Stamford (*Proc. Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, LI [1958], 56, fig. 4, 9), and the other handle might be compared with that on a storage vessel from Chichester (*Sussex Archaeological Collections*, XCI [1953], fig. 16 following p. 150).

OBJECT OF UNKNOWN USE

(11) In coarse grey ware with an inturned rim. The raised cordons are decorated with knife slashes and a scar suggests the site of a handle, but it seems rather unlikely that such rough work could be a jug. It might be kiln furniture (compare Romano-British examples, *Archaeological Journal*, CXIV [1957], 10-27, especially plate VIc), or be an ornamental piece. It is very different from the known medieval ventilating finials and chimney pots.

SMALL BOWL

(12) Hard coarse light-grey ware, with incurved rim. Probably for industrial rather than domestic use.

STORAGE VESSELS (3 examples)

(13) Hard-fired sandy-buff ware, decorated with applied bands of clay with continuous thumb impressions. The shape is restored after a similar vessel found at Maidenhead Street, Hertford. These huge vessels derive from Roman forms, and were probably used for storing liquids or grain. Many Saxo-Norman examples have been found at Cambridge (*Proc. Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, L [1957], 53-60), but the Hertfordshire examples seem to date from the later thirteenth century (*Antiquaries Journal*, XIX [1939], 303-12).

DEEP BOWLS (about 20 examples)

(14) is a rimsherd in tile-red ware with deep pinholes in the rim. The large perforation would have allowed it to be hung over a fire, or a pushed-in stick would have made a crude frying-pan. However, most of the bowls were in fine grey or buff ware, some rims being recessed for a lid. To give a better grip when hot, heavy or greasy, (15) has vertical finger-pressed strips, and (16) has fine horizontal striations.

