

## **Ceramics of the south-east: new directions**

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### **Introduction**

The South East region contains a complete ceramic sequence, although overall the distribution of various ceramic styles is varied, with marked concentrations along the coastal regions of Sussex and Kent, and along the corridor of the Thames (Surrey). Since the 1990s the impact of developer funded archaeology has added significantly to the number of known assemblages, although the distribution of the new material tends to reflect those areas that have seen most development. In this respect it is not surprising that considerable new assemblages have been found in parts of Kent where there have been major infrastructure projects. The Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL), for example, which passes through the Medway Valley (an area with major groups of monuments) and then crosses the North Downs dip slope to the coast (an area devoid of Neolithic monuments) (see Ashbee 2004, 11), has produced 11 assemblages of earlier prehistoric pottery. Notable sites include Sandway Road, Cobham, Tutt Hill, Whitehill Road, Beechbrook Wood and Saltwood Tunnel (Barclay and Edwards 2007), and the dry valley at White Horse Stone/Pilgrim's Way (see Hayden this web site). Important too is the discovery of sites under colluvium, perhaps the most significant of which are White Horse Stone with its early Neolithic buildings, late Neolithic stake and post circles and multiple pit deposits, and Holywell Coombe with its Beaker settlement. Developer-funded projects have also added a number of new causewayed enclosures to areas of Kent, notably on the Isle of Sheppey (Kingsborough Farm) and at Ramsgate (Healy, this web site; Lievers, this web site).

The STDR4 Road Scheme and the northern section of CTRL have added new groups of Ebbsfleet Ware, while the research excavations at Runnymede have added substantial assemblages of bowl/Ebbsfleet Ware. Extensive occupation deposits associated with Peterborough Ware have been found in North Kent and the Lower Thames Valley (e.g. Runnymede, Baston Manor, Ebbsfleet River Crossing and Ebbsfleet), although sites such as Bullock Down, East Sussex (Drewett 1982) indicate the potential of other areas. So far, the extensive pit group sites associated with Mortlake and Fengate styles, which typify parts of the Middle and Upper Thames, remain elusive in the South East. However, there are important associations with monuments, not least the recovery of a large assemblage of Ebbsfleet and Mortlake style vessels from a penannular ditched enclosure at Shepperton (Cotton 2004; Jones 1990, and Phil Jones pers. comm.), from the ditches of the Badshot long barrow, and from the ditches of some causewayed enclosures (e.g. Staines and Whitehawk). Mention must also be made of the finds of Peterborough Ware bowls from the River Thames and its foreshore (Cotton 2004; Barclay 2002).

Research investigations at Ringlemere following the chance discovery of an Early Bronze Age gold cup has led to the excavation of a large class I henge associated with a nationally-important assemblage (5500 sherds) of Clacton style Grooved Ware (Varndell 2006, 41-3), while further assemblages of Clacton style Grooved Ware have been recovered from various sites along route of CTRL (Barclay and Edwards 2007). Beaker assemblages from contexts sealed by colluvium are well known from parts of Sussex (Bell 1983), and it is now possible to extend this distribution into Kent as well (Allen 2005) with the most productive site being Holywell Coombe (Bennett *et. al.* 1998). In the Thames Valley comparable traces of

settlement have been found in alluviated landscapes (e.g. at Runnymede and just outside the region at the Eton Rowing Course). Beaker-associated pit deposits are still relatively rare in some areas, although new sites have been found as a result of large-scale excavation. Although CTRL has added a small number of new sites, with the exception of a single pottery-rich pit deposit at Beechbrook Wood these tend to be relatively isolated and pottery finds sparse. Recent work at Springhead has identified a series of paired pits associated with a relatively large assemblage (400-500 sherds) of East Anglian style Beaker. Elsewhere in the region Beaker pits are still relatively scarce (especially in Surrey).

### **Chronology: current understanding and new directions**

Our present understanding of ceramic-based chronology has been improved by a series of critiques and new reports (eg Herne 1988; Barclay 2006; Garwood 1999; Cleal and MacSween 1999; Needham 1996, 2005 and 2006; Gibson and Kinnes 1996). This has resulted in a well-defined framework for the development of Neolithic and Early Bronze Age ceramics. Scientific dating has also undergone a revolution with the development of the Bayesian approach to radiocarbon dating, which in the future will bring far greater precision to such frameworks. Instead of approximating in centuries we now have the ability to talk in terms of human generations. So far, this approach has been used within this region to re-date selected causewayed enclosures and their associated bowl assemblages (Healy, this web site), Grooved Ware from various CTRL sites (Allen *et al.* 2007; Derek Hamilton and Alex Bayliss pers. comm.), while at a national level the dating of Beaker pottery has been modelled (Frances Healy pers. comm.) and Peter Marshall is working on Peterborough Ware (pers. comm.).

The application of Bayesian techniques to the dating of ceramic assemblages in the South East could greatly improve our knowledge of the regional sequence (e.g. the Grooved Ware from Ringlemere; the bowl/Ebbsfleet ware assemblages from Runnymede; and the Carinated Bowl assemblage from Staines Road, Shepperton, Surrey). Developer-funded archaeology is adding many new dates (for example, CTRL Section 1 has provided a total of 33 radiocarbon dates for contexts associated with pottery), which significantly increases the number of published dates available for both Kent and the South East more widely (Allen *et al.* 2007).

One aim then should be to build a regional chronology based on high quality radiocarbon dates for the three counties that can be compared with ones from adjacent regions (e.g. Wessex, the middle and upper Thames Valley and East Anglia).

### **Understanding assemblages: the social aspect**

Pottery assemblages are still too often divorced from their social context. Future work needs to concentrate on understating the role of pottery vessels within the sphere of human habitation. We still know very little about how vessels were used and just as much attention needs to be given to recording signs of use, damage and repair. The analysis of charred and fatty residues offers some possibilities in this direction. Only limited work within the region has been undertaken to date. Lipid analysis has been usefully employed to identify dairy products and other animal fats in pottery of this period: one emerging pattern found at sites in the Upper and Middle Thames Valley (Ascotts-under-Wychwood, Eton Rowing Lake and Yarnton) is that pottery appears to have been used to consume and cook different types of animal products. On the whole, Beaker pottery appears not to have been used in the consumption of animal-based food, although further study is required to demonstrate that this applies to all Beaker vessels. Attempts to correlate vessel form (and other attributes such as fabric) with types of residue have, however, failed to find any significant patterns. Indirectly, such results can be used to inform whether the choice of resources (clay and

inclusions/temper) was for cultural or technological reasons. Lipid residue analysis can also reveal those vessels that have been used repeatedly as cooking pots.

The role of pottery is likely to have changed through time. Development of shape over time (i.e. from bowl to jar), the introduction of new forms, and fluctuations in the range of vessel forms all suggest this pottery functions were far from constant. The wide range of vessel forms found with bowl, Peterborough ware and Grooved Ware are arguably not found with Beakers and this is supported by a near absence of charred and fatty residues. Beakers then may indicate a change of use, or more restricted or more specialised uses of pottery. Whatever their purpose Beakers appeared in a variety of styles and sizes on occupation sites and in graves. Studies still focus too much on the funerary evidence, while the important non-funerary assemblages should provide the baseline for future work. Pit groups in particular provide a snapshot of vessels that were in contemporaneous use. The relationship in this region between Beakers and other types of Early Bronze Age pottery (Food Vessels, Collared Urns, Accessory vessels and Biconical Urns) also requires greater understanding. None of these styles is widely distributed and little is known about how such material was used beyond deposition in funerary contexts.

### **Technology, manufacture, innovation and change**

Analysis of pottery vessels can reveal important details of resources, method of manufacture and technology. The meaning of temper/inclusions and why this changed over time is still a subject for debate. The identification and analysis of pottery residues may provide a new way to evaluate this. Work outside the region would appear to suggest that the choice of temper may have been for cultural and symbolic reasons rather than purely technological purposes. The mapping of fabrics over time for the region (see Barclay and Edwards 2007) will help our understanding of what influenced such choices. It is generally agreed that most pottery was locally produced but this needs to be re-evaluated against our understanding of contemporaneous settlement patterns, whether these are considered to be semi-sedentary or mobile. Occasionally, the work of specialist potters can be recognised and here we need to be able to identify vessels that could be non-local or of significant high quality to be considered the product of an individual potter's workshop.

### **'Life' assemblages: use, function**

It is important to understand how the pottery we recover from certain types of context (the 'death' assemblage) relates to the actual complete repertoire of vessels that was used in life (the 'life' assemblage). One approach is to compare contemporaneous pottery assemblages that have been recovered from different types of context: for example, the comparison of Beaker pottery recovered from occupation spreads and/or colluvial sequences with material discovered in burials and pits. It has long been recognised that Beaker pottery recovered from burials is not completely representative of the total range of vessels (see Gibson 1982; Case 1993). In particular, the coarser and larger vessels (including so-called pot beakers), perhaps those more likely to be used by communities rather than individuals, are under-represented. Needham's suggested sequence for the development of Beaker pottery needs to be developed so that it also fully embraces the pottery recovered from such non-funerary contexts. The special and/or restricted roles of Early Bronze Age vessels (Food Vessels, Collared Urns and accessory vessels) are still poorly understood. In the South East this situation is not helped by the fact that relatively few of these vessels are known from graves in Kent and Surrey, while even fewer have been recovered from pits or occupation deposits.

The range of vessels for any one period is likely to reflect specific practices such as cooking, serving and storage of food. From the Early Neolithic onwards, ceramic assemblages have

been found to include a range of vessels from small individual cups/bowls to larger vessels used for communal activities. With pit deposits, in particular, we have the opportunity to explore the possible range of vessels that were in contemporaneous use and to examine which vessels had specific functions.

### **'Death' assemblages: taphonomy, depositional contexts and practice**

A significant proportion of the pottery recovered is derived from monuments, graves and pits. It is noticeable how changes in depositional practice across space and time can distort the archaeological record. In periods or areas where broken pottery was not deliberately buried, the chances of recovery are low. However, in the South East region, exceptional circumstances such as alluviated/colluviated landscapes can help fill such gaps. Key assemblages have been recovered from the Thames Valley (e.g. Runnymede), from Ebbsfleet, and in the case of Beaker from parts of Kent and Sussex (Bell 1983; Allen 2005). Detailed contextual recording of pottery within features should provide important information on how and where breakage took place. It is important, if arguments concerning structured deposition are to be explored, to identify the difference between types of deposit and to recognise whether material has been randomly tipped, arranged or placed. Similarly, the quantification of various attributes such as sherd size, condition, breakage and vessel elements present could also shed light on certain depositional practices. An understanding of the breakage pattern of refitting sherds should reveal how many damage events could have taken place and, therefore, improve understanding of the depositional process.

### **Connections: cultural links and long-distance exchange**

The assumption is often made that most prehistoric pottery was locally made with only a very small proportion of vessels being moved over longer distances. For the period under discussion there was clearly fluctuating levels of inter-regional contact with adjacent regions of mainland England and Atlantic Europe. The initial inspiration for pottery was undoubtedly from adjacent areas of Continental Europe, evident from comparisons made between British Carinated Bowl ceramics and pottery from the Netherlands and north-west France. Similarly, the adoption and use of Grooved Ware appears to have spread from Scotland and possibly Ireland. Early styles of Beaker have also been traced to the Continent (see Clarke 1970; Needham 2005), as have inception series Biconical Urns linked with vessels from the Low Countries and Northern France (Cruse 2007; Tomalin 1988). However, there is very little evidence to indicate long-distance exchange of pottery. For most periods what we tend to find are local copies or interpretations of exotic styles. The connection between distant places and how we interpret this evidence in terms of process and practice is of some importance. For this region movement along the coast, across the channel and along the Thames are all significant possibilities (see Needham *et al.* 2006 for recent discussions; also Perkins 2006; Tomalin 1995, 1998).

### **Context and overview**

The pottery of the 4th to early 2nd millennium cal BC can be viewed as a series of overlapping traditions of differing duration, reflecting both continuity and discontinuities such as the introduction of novel forms and changes in style and materials. The bowl tradition can be seen as a continuous and possible gradual development from the first use of pottery (Carinated Bowl) through to the full development of Peterborough Ware styles (Impressed Wares: Ebbsfleet, Mortlake and Fengate). It is argued elsewhere (Barclay 2006; Barclay forthcoming) that within the Carinated Bowl phase it is possible to differentiate between early and late assemblages, and the same may be true of the so-called plain and decorated bowl phase. The position of Ebbsfleet ware within this sequence remains uncertain for the simple

reason that there are still relatively few radiocarbon dates associated with these vessels. However, it is suggested that this style developed around the 36th century cal BC and that Mortlake/Fengate ware substyles developed out of it in the period 3350-2800 cal BC (Barclay 2006; Gibson and Kinnes 1997).

Within the region Carinated Bowl assemblages have been found in a wide range of contexts that include buildings, monuments, pits, middens, burials, and flint mines. Early assemblages tend to have quite simple rims with squared, everted or rounded profiles, while later assemblages can contain rolled rims and other heavier types. Carinations tend to be set relatively low down the profile and necks are comparatively tall and concave in profile. One of the earliest pottery assemblages from this region comes from the construction and use of the building at White Horse Stone, Kent, which has been dated to the period 3900-3750 cal BC (Allen *et al.* 2006; Healy this web site; and Derek Hamilton pers. comm.). In contrast, the assemblage from Staines Road, Shepperton, may belong to the more developed phase (3800-3650 cal BC). Carinated Bowl has been noted at a few other sites in Kent (Herne 1988). These include pottery from the Chestnuts long barrow and possibly a rim sherd from the Coldrum chamber. Less certain are the vessels from Mill Road in Upper Deal, and Minnis Bay (Dunning 1966; Macpherson-Grant 1969), as neither has 'classic' Carinated Bowl features. Other finds include pottery from the St Richard's Road pit site, Deal (Gibson 1995), and the residual material from the enclosure at Chalk Hill, Ramsgate (Gibson quoted in Gibson and Leivers forthcoming)

It is generally accepted that decorated and plain bowl developed out of these earlier carinated assemblages during the 37th century cal BC, at a time when causewayed enclosures were being constructed (Barclay 2006). In general, bowl pottery is distributed along the Thames corridor, around the coast of eastern Kent and along the chalkdowns of Sussex. It is notable, in this context, that Kent sits between two of the recognised style zones: the Mildenhall style centred on East Anglia; and the Whitehawk style found along the south coast. The region has several large assemblages of pottery recovered from excavated causewayed enclosures (e.g. Whitehawk, Kingsborough, and Staines), and smaller assemblages from long barrows (Badshot), ring ditches (Shepperton), and pits and occupation sites (Runnymede and Baston Manor). The two Kingsborough enclosures produced the remains of nearly 550 vessels, some of which have affinities with the Mildenhall style. In addition, many small assemblages are known (e.g. at least six assemblages were added by the CTRL and related projects).

Overlapping with the use of bowl pottery is the Ebbsfleet style of Peterborough ware. This pottery is found at some causewayed enclosures (e.g. Coombe Hill, Staines, Whitehawk), usually in secondary contexts. As discussed above, this pottery probably first appeared around 3600-3500 cal BC and would have been contemporaneous with some assemblages of plain and decorated bowl. The eponymous type site for Ebbsfleet ware (Burchell and Piggott 1939) is directly adjacent to the line of CTRL Section 2 and further assemblages have been found. It has also been recovered from a number of sites in the Thames Valley (e.g. Mixhams Pit, Runnymede, and Shepperton). In Kent, clusters of sites occur in the north-east part of the county on Thanet, the North Downs and around Folkestone (Ashbee 2004, 11-12). The best-known Ebbsfleet style assemblages are from Ebbsfleet itself (Burchell and Piggott 1939) and from Baston Manor (Smith 1973). A small assemblage was recovered from the Castle Hill causewayed enclosure, Folkestone (Ashbee 2005, 115). CTRL has added a number of small assemblages (sites include Ebbsfleet River Crossing, White Horse Stone/Pilgrims Way, Sandway Road, Tutt Hill, Little Stock Farm, and Saltwood Tunnel).

The Grooved Ware tradition of the 3rd millennium cal BC, which appears to have been introduced from northern Britain, has its beginnings in southern England in the 29th century

cal BC (Garwood 1999). Overlap between the southern sub-styles has been recognised for some time and it is probable that the Woodlands sub-style developed out of an earlier Clacton sub-style (see various papers in Cleal and MacSween 1999). The Durrington Walls sub-style appears on current evidence to have developed in parallel with the other two (see Garwood 1999).

Grooved Ware finds in the South East have been largely restricted to sites (occupation horizons and pits) located near to the coast (Longworth 1971, 278-9; Longworth and Cleal 1999, 189-90) and on the whole tend to be recovered as relatively small assemblages. Where diagnostic material occurs affinities can be suggested with the Durrington Walls and Clacton sub-styles and it appears to be the case that assemblages sometimes contain characteristics of both styles. Longworth and Cleal (*ibid*) reported only 12 very small assemblages from Kent, not all of which could be attributed to a particular sub-style. They also noted that very little Grooved Ware occurred in Surrey or Sussex in contrast to adjacent areas. More recently, the Ringlemere henge and the pit sites found on the route of the CTRL have significantly added to the number of known Grooved Ware assemblages. From Surrey there are also some recent finds from near Stanwell and from sites on the Greensand (Barclay 1999; Cotton 2004; Williams 2004). Of course, it can be noted that henges and related monuments are almost absent from most areas of the South East with the possible exception of north-east Kent (Garwood 2003; Needham *et al.* 2006).

The development of Beaker pottery has been reconsidered by Needham (2005). He suggests that Beakers are generally rare before 2200 cal BC, and this may well be the case in Kent and the Sussex chalklands, with an explosion of vessel types after this date (*ibid*). In 1982 Champion noted that at least 36 substantial or near complete Beakers had been found in Kent (Champion 1982, 32), mostly from funerary contexts. Further funerary sites and a number of occupation sites of this date have since come to light. An important occupation site has been recovered under colluvium at Holywell Coombe, near Folkestone (Gibson 1998), and Beaker pottery was recovered from at least seven of the CTRL sites (Barclay and Edwards 2007).

Food Vessels are generally rare in the South East although a number of new finds have been made in Kent (e.g. on Thanet and at Saltwood). Collared Urns are rare in Surrey but more numerous from the chalklands of Sussex. For Kent, Longworth mentioned 11 urns (1984, 216-217), mostly from the barrows or flat graves in the north-east of the county. To this can be added a few new finds from projects such as CTRL. Biconical Urns and accessory cups are also relatively rare finds from Kent and Surrey.

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