

## British Association for Local History: ONLINE REVIEWS (July 2020)

**POTS, POTTERS AND POTTERIES OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE 1200–1910** by *Michael Farley and Barbara Hurman* (Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society 2019 xii+130pp ISBN 978-0-9957177-5-6) £15

Archaeologists sometimes seem to be obsessed with pottery, and a large proportion of excavation reports is dedicated to the analysis of ceramics. This is because pottery is easily broken but very difficult to destroy, so ceramics form one of the largest categories of finds. Analysis of the fabrics and forms can reveal where and when that pottery was made, which in turn allows it to be used for dating, the examination of site formation processes, and the reconstruction of trade patterns, among other themes. This volume, a revised version of an article originally published in *Records of Buckinghamshire* for 2015, is an introduction to the subject for that county. It is written with both specialist and non-specialist in mind, with marginal notes explaining such matters as how the Harvard referencing system works. The volume is in two parts: a short introductory section and a longer parish-by-parish gazetteer of the evidence for the industry. It is lavishly illustrated in colour, and there is an excellent bibliography.

The introduction briefly covers a number of themes including an interesting discussion of potters in the written record. Unsurprisingly, early references are sparse, but by the eighteenth, and especially the nineteenth, centuries there are frequent references to potters in wills and censuses. Other sections include the resources needed for potteries (clay and fuel); hawkers and dealers; and the relationship with the widespread ceramic building material industry.

The main part of the book is a 'gazetteer of information about potters and potteries'. This is arranged by parish, which can sometimes be problematic because of boundary changes or ambiguities in the written record. Most have an introductory section followed, where the information is available, by details of known kilns, potters (from the written sources) and 'indicative names'. The size of entries varies greatly with, for example, the important centre at Brill taking up nineteen pages, whereas Wotton Underwood has but one indicative name from 1649: Crockers Edge Furlong. One dips into the gazetteer, rather than reading from end to end. The evidence employed is very varied, from excavations to the Domesday Book, sherds found on the surface of a field to personal communications. Where available, the products are illustrated by material from the county museum. Maps, excavation plans and photographs enliven the entries.

I expected a rather dry archaeological account of forms and fabrics, but that is not what this book provides. The combination of information about the industry and its products, and the people involved in it, is as interesting and informative as it was unexpected. This book could, and should, form the starting point for a variety of further research. Potteries that are only known from vague historical references could be looked for on the ground, and the foundations are laid for a social history of, for example, the pot-hawkers of Amersham. The authors should be applauded for bringing together such a disparate range of evidence, the result of many years' work, and the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society should be applauded for publishing such an interesting volume at such a reasonable price.

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