MAYNARD'S GATE, CROWBOROUGH, SUSSEX

The Pottery

Anthony D.F.Streeten

The five sherds from Maynard's Gate are typical of the quantity of pottery recovered from medieval iron-working sites in the area[1], although in this instance the context of discovery does not permit the furnace itself to be assigned to the medieval period on ceramic evidence alone.

Three fabric types are represented[2]:-

1. Shell-/sand-tempered ware; one sherd. Dark grey core with red-buff oxidised margins. Soft fabric with fairly smooth vesicular surface and rough fracture. Moderate inclusions of medium/fine dark quartz sand; some shell-temper indicated by plate-like voids. Dissolution of the shell in acid soil conditions could cause the vesicular surface[3]; alternatively, the temper may have burnt out during firing.
2. Grey sand-tempered ware; three sherds. Dark grey core with red margins and grey surface. Fairly hard, harsh textured fabric with rough fracture. Common inclusions of medium quartz sand, and rare specs of red iron ore.
3. Red sand-tempered ware; one sherd. Red-pink throughout. Hard, smooth texture with fairly smooth fracture. Moderate inclusions of fine quartz sand and specs of red iron ore; rare fragments of siltstone.

None of these wares can be positively attributed to specific kilns, but Fabrics 1 and 2 have been recognised on other iron-working sites in the High Weald and can be paralleled at Minepit Wood[4] and Parrock[5]. Fabric 3 is superficially similar to some of the red sand-tempered wares at Parrock where white-slipped decorated jugs of this type can be attributed to the Earlswood kiln near Reigate[6]. In the absence of featured sherds from Maynard's Gate, however, the source cannot be determined although the siltstone inclusions would be consistent with manufacture within the broad geographical area of Wealden clays.

Dating is hazardous, if not impossible. Shell-tempering (Fabric 1) does not occur in West Kent groups after c. 1300[7] and appears to die out in West Surrey at least half a century earlier. These and the sand-tempered wares (Fabric 2), however, were found at Minepit Wood where industrial activity is dated by Carbon-14 to the fourteenth-fifteenth century[8]. For the forseeable future, physical methods of dating medieval bloomeries will be of greater significance than traditional

ceramic typologies; even a broad range of absolute dates would help to establish the longevity of pottery types within the Weald.

1 Area-excavation of the medieval iron-working complex at Minepit Wood produced a total of only 29 sherds (J.H.Money, 'Medieval iron-workings in Minepit Wood, Rotherfield, Sussex', Med. Arch. xv (1971), 88 Fig.31).

2 Fabric descriptions follow the conventions proposed by Peacock in D.P.S.Peacock (ed.), Pottery and Early Commerce, Academic Press, 1977, 26-32.

3 Arch. Cant. xcii (1976), 187.

4 J.H.Money, op. cit.in note 1, 107-8

5 C.F.Tebbutt, 'An abandoned medieval industrial site at Parrock, Hartfield', Sx.A.C. 113 (1975), 148-9.

6 D.J.Turner, 'Medieval pottery kiln at Bushfield Shaw, Earlswood: Interim report', Sy.A.C. lxx (1974), 47-55.

7 S.E.Rigold, 'Eynsford Castle and its excavation', Arch. Cant.lxxxvi (1971), 149.

8 J.H.Money, op. cit. in note 1, 90 and 94.