Toolkit for finds: pottery

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Contents

Note: words highlighted in purple within this document have definitions within the Glossary section.

Introduction

[Pottery](#) has several attributes that give it great potential to inform the study of human activity in the past.

- The material a pot is made from, known as the [fabric](#), consists of clay and inclusions. These can be used to identify where a pot's raw materials were obtained from, as well as indicate manufacturing techniques and the date of the pot.

- The overall shape of a pot, known as the form, the character of component parts such as rims and handles, the technique and style of decoration, and aspects of surface treatment can all indicate when and how a pot was made and used, as well as serving to define cultural affinities.

The interpretation of pottery is based on a detailed characterisation of the types present in any group, supported by rigorous quantification and consistent approaches to analysis that facilitate comparison between [assemblages](#). This will lead to an understanding of the progress of technology, methods and patterns of distribution, modes of consumption and processes of deposition. Those conclusions will help us understand the people who occupied a site in the past, including their social, economic and cultural circumstances and the ways in which they interacted with material culture, as well as informing the chronology of the activities represented by the surviving evidence.

If the study of pottery is to reach its full potential, it is vital that we recover and analyse it to a high and consistent standard. This Toolkit covers the entire process of pottery work in archaeology, ensuring that the information gained will inform present and future studies of the past.

Background

This Toolkit converts the content of the published *A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology* (PDF, Barclay et al 2016) into the *Toolkit for Finds: Pottery*. This project was funded by Historic England and undertaken by a team of consultants from Archaeology South-East with the support of the original authors and of the [Prehistoric Ceramic Research Group](#) (PCRG), the [Study Group for Roman Pottery](#) (SGRP), and the [Medieval and Later Pottery Research Group](#) (MLPRG).

The publication of *A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology* (PDF) meant that pottery was one of the few archaeological material categories with robust good practice guidance in place. It was used in the *Review of the Standard of Reporting on Archaeological Artefacts in England* (PDF, Cattermole 2017) and several archaeological guidance documents and resources have been influenced by and refer to its quality and content, including [The Archaeologist's Guide to Good Practice](#) and the CIfA [Toolkit for Specialist Reporting](#).

Its original production was testament to the long-standing commitment of the three specialist pottery groups active in the UK – PCRG, SGRP and the MLPRG – to high-quality professional practice for archaeological pottery studies. These three groups have a wide UK and international membership including, but not limited to, professional and non-professional archaeologists,

potters, and those studying, working or volunteering in the wider heritage and museum sectors. Each of the groups has previously provided independent feedback to the CIfA *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (PDF, CIfA 2014a).

A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology (PDF) has been converted into this CIfA Toolkit to make the content available in a user-friendly online format, one that has proved successful for sharing other resources and guidance, for example, the Toolkit for Specialist Reporting. Unlike static documents, this format enables

- the inclusion of downloadable resources (eg record templates)

- signposting to other online resources

- a quicker and easier process for amendments/additions to content

This was also an opportunity to update the content with more recently available resources and guidance, particularly the Toolkit for Specialist Reporting, the Toolkit for Recording Archaeological Materials, the Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives, the Toolkit for Managing Digital Data (Dig Digital) and the recently updated *Standards* and *Universal guidance for archaeological excavation*, *archaeological field evaluation* and *archaeological monitoring and recording* – see CIfA Code, regulations and standards & guidance.

The content of this Toolkit outlines the recommended approach to all aspects of pottery work as described in *A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology* (PDF). As such, the Toolkit supports and promotes a consistent, good-practice approach to all aspects of pottery work that facilitates compliance with the *CIfA Standard for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (PDF, CIfA 2014a). We strongly advise that all those practising the study of pottery adhere to the guidance within this Toolkit. It is endorsed by the PCRG, MLPRG and SGRP and will help to ensure that those practising both in the UK and internationally are providing data that enables the comparative study of different assemblages according to professional standards and guidance.

Using the Toolkit

Purpose of the Toolkit

The Toolkit aims to

- set out accepted methods for working with pottery assemblages in accordance with CIfA Standards and guidance (see CIfA 2014a) and other relevant CIfA Toolkits, especially the Toolkit for Specialist Reporting

- ensure pottery assemblages from all types of archaeological project are recovered and analysed consistently, thus producing the levels of information required to allow detailed and informed interpretations

- facilitate the monitoring of project planning, finds recovery, pottery analysis and reporting

- inform the staffing of project teams, so that recognised, competent pottery specialists are included

▪ assist in archive compilation and curation in relation to pottery assemblages

The Toolkit is designed to ensure pottery work undertaken complies with the *CIfA Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (PDF, CIfA 2014a):

> *Collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (hereafter finds work) will result in an ordered, stable, accessible archive using appropriate methods and practices. Finds work will result in report(s) intended for dissemination. The methods and practices employed must satisfy the stated aims of any project of which finds work comprises all or part, and comply with the Code of conduct and other relevant regulations of CIfA.*

Who is the Toolkit for?

The Toolkit is intended be used

- by pottery specialists working on assemblages from any type of archaeological project, to ensure that pottery is collected, processed, recorded, analysed and reported to consistent levels

- as a specification by project managers (or anyone managing the processing and analysis of a pottery assemblage) to require finds personnel and pottery specialists to apply the Toolkit throughout an archaeological project, including the analysis and re-interpretation of pottery studied previously and now in storage, for instance in a museum collection

- to monitor the quality of pottery assessment, analysis and reporting – for example, in peer review, or development control archaeologists overseeing planning-led projects, or museum curators receiving project archives

- in combination with existing standards for processing, recording and reporting of other types of finds, or with standards for the compilation and transfer of archive materials

- as a training resource for students and new specialists

Structure of the Toolkit

All parts of an archaeological project are covered and the Toolkit sections are set out in accordance with the main project activities:

- project planning

- collection

- processing

- recording

- reporting

- archive

The Toolkit is supported by a glossary of terms used; useful resources including digital downloads and more detailed methodological guidance; and references and recommended reading.

Project Planning

All archaeological projects, including the re-analysis of pottery in curated collections, should be supported by a project design. Where the recovery and/or analysis of pottery is anticipated, it is important to follow the points set out in the Toolkit to ensure that pottery work is properly resourced and carried out by appropriately experienced personnel (pottery specialists) with clear aims and objectives.

Project planning should involve the production of a project proposal or brief, which sets out the context, aims and purpose of the intended project. In development control terms, this is a project brief. This is followed by a project design, which may be referred to by different names depending on where the work is taking place – for example, written scheme of investigation (WSI), method statement, programme of works, etc. These documents describe the methodology to be followed, strategies for recovery, sampling and selection, the resources required and a timetable for completion (see *The project design*, below).

A pottery specialist should be involved in the creation of a selection strategy as part of the project design (see the Toolkit for Specialist Reporting for guidance). If significant pottery evidence is revealed unexpectedly you will need to amend the project design and selection strategy in consultation with a pottery specialist. Seek specialist input throughout the lifecycle of the project.

Tasks for project planning

During project planning the project executive should

- reference sites or pottery assemblages previously recovered from within or close to the project location that will inform the planned project

- require the use of recognised standards and guidance (ie this Toolkit) for all tasks related to pottery

- ensure local and national requirements are met for the use of local, regional or national fabric and form series identified by the pottery specialist and that these are referenced appropriately (eg Tomber and Dore 1998 for the Roman Pottery Fabric Reference Collection and the MLPRG's Classification of Medieval Ceramic Forms)

- ensure the project complies with the relevant regional and national regulations and requirements with regard to the recovery of archaeological material (eg The Treasure Act 1996)

During project planning the project manager should

- identify and contact an appropriately experienced pottery specialist to join the project team; more than one specialist may be required for multi-period projects

- ensure that provision is made for the pottery specialist to familiarise themselves with the character, date, quantity and distribution of pottery previously retrieved from the project area, and ensure access to local type series

- consult with the identified pottery specialist to develop a strategy for the collection, sampling, selection, recording, processing and analysis of the pottery assemblage (as per the [Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives](#))

- consider the application of scientific techniques such as petrographic or chemical analysis of fabrics, organic residue analysis and radiocarbon dating; using these techniques will require specific collection methods for samples and the involvement of different specialists

- ensure that effective communications are established with and between the project team so that information and interpretations may be exchanged, especially when several pottery specialists are working on the same project

- identify the repository that will receive the project archive, in accordance with recognised archive standards. A copy of the archive compilation and transfer standards required by the repository should be obtained and understood; this will inform the management and treatment of pottery assemblages during recovery, analysis and archiving. This may include how to clean, mark or label, package and box pottery, as well as the management of the documentary archive.

The project design

A project design should comply with all relevant CIfA Standards and guidance to be fit for purpose – see the *[Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials](#)* (PDF, CIfA 2014a) and the *[Universal guidance for archaeological excavation](#)* (PDF, CIfA 2023) for further information and examples.

Things to include in relation to finds and, more specifically, pottery assemblages, are

- details for adequate resourcing (in terms of time, budget, facilities and equipment) of the pottery specialist for recording, analysis and reporting; site visits by the pottery specialist, attendance at project meetings and visits to pottery type series and comparative collections and assemblages, may also be required

- the types of scientific applications likely to be used and how they will be resourced

- a strategy for excavating buried features; from a pottery research point of view, it is best to excavate 100% of all features and recover for analysis 100% of the pottery present in each contextual unit. In practice 100% recovery is rare. Any collection strategy based on recovering less than 100% of the pottery present (for instance in large industrial [dumps of wasters](#)) should, therefore, be developed by the relevant project personnel, including the project executive, the pottery specialist and the repository curator, following specialist assessment of the significance of the material. Any such strategy will affect the quantity of pottery collected for analysis and the pottery specialist should be consulted during its formulation to ensure that it reflects properly the potential of the project with regard to the pottery research aims

- an archive selection strategy for all recovered material, in accordance with the requirements of the project archive repository and based on advice from the pottery specialist. The aim is to compile a project archive that includes all material with potential

to inform future research and other enquiries. It is recommended that all stratified material be retained in the archive, although in very large assemblages, such as those from pottery production sites, it is recognised that this is unrealistic. It should also be recognised that some assemblages will contain material that may not seem relevant to the aims of the project but could be of interest to pottery researchers, such as locally made 19th- or 20th-century pots bearing the names of local traders. Selection strategies should therefore be agreed and recorded between the project executive, the project manager, appropriate specialists and the repository curator in accordance with recommendations in the [Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives](#)

- a data management plan (DMP) that sets out procedures for making digital material secure and accessible, as per the [Toolkit for Managing Digital Data (Dig Digital).](#) Almost every archaeological project produces digital material and it is important that this is managed effectively to ensure its security and accessibility. Pottery analysis is often conducted by specialists working outside the organisation managing the project, frequently in a freelance capacity. Specialists should be included in the DMP and required to follow protocols for backing up, file naming, structure and format. The DMP should also identify the Trusted Digital Repository that will curate the project digital archive. The standards required by the repository should be referenced in the DMP and all external specialists made aware of them.

- reference to the requirement to publish or otherwise disseminate and the provision for resources needed

- reference to the potential costs of conservation, packing and transfer into curation of the pottery, given that at this stage the size and character of the assemblage will not be known

- the procedure for obtaining transfer of title, as appropriate, depending on site location and the relevant regional and national legalisation and policies

Role of the pottery specialist

The nominated pottery specialist should have appropriate period and regional experience and should advise the project manager to ensure that

- discussions of project-specific strategies and the potential of the pottery assemblage to take into account regional, subject and period research frameworks, with particular reference to those developed by the [PCRG](#), [SGRP](#) and the MLPRG

- the project team considers strategies for maximising the potential of the pottery assemblage for elucidating site-specific and wider research questions; these could include, for example, the examination of site formation processes, the use of organic residue analysis to establish the functions of vessels, or the characterisation of pottery fabrics to explore patterns of local, regional, national and international production and distribution and use

- full consideration is given by the project team to the particular problems that may be encountered with ceramic assemblages from sites of particular date and in different

areas, and the potential implications of this for the excavation strategy. An example of this is the regional variability in the abundance of Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age domestic pottery, which on many sites in Britain is poorly represented in the archaeological record; on many sites of this period, therefore, 100% excavation of feature fills may be essential to ensure assemblages are sufficiently large to permit useful quantitative analysis

- the project design provides for consultation with relevant national, regional and site-based pottery type series; it is crucial that existing type series and their associated terminology are followed, as this will facilitate future comparative studies of assemblages and sites

- the project design specifies that existing standards for pottery work are applied

- provision is made for comprehensive characterisation, quantification and reporting of all or part of the pottery assemblage in accordance with this Toolkit for pottery work

- the project design includes provision for the application of scientific analytical techniques, such as thin-section analysis, as appropriate

Collection

This section sets out requirements for collection during fieldwork. It should be considered alongside other published standards and guidance for fieldwork, including those published by CIfA:

- CIfA Code, regulations and standards & guidance

- the relevant CIfA Toolkits including the Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives

- other guidance including *The Archaeologist's Guide to Good Practice* – see References and further reading for more examples

Pottery assemblages may be recovered during most forms of intrusive archaeology project, including land surface or seabed collection, archaeological monitoring and recording (also referred to as watching brief), archaeological field evaluation and archaeological excavation. All the pottery found in every (also referred to as contextual unit should be collected in accordance with the strategies agreed during project planning. Unexpected finds, such as graves or waster dumps, may lead to the modification of strategies for collection, sampling or selection. Amendments to the project design or selection strategy should take place following discussions with the personnel who developed the strategies at the outset, which would normally include the project executive, the project manager, the pottery specialists and the repository curator.

During fieldwork productive communication between the archaeological team on site, project manager and the pottery specialist is key, and their shared purpose should be to ensure that any alterations in collection and/or processing strategies continue to guarantee that the maximum potential of the pottery assemblage can be achieved. Site visits and pottery scans by the pottery specialist help to inform work on site, collection and sampling strategies and to develop post-fieldwork methods. A visit from a pottery specialist could also provide an indication of chronology, identify special deposits and highlight potential problems of redeposition.

1. Recover all the pottery found in every contextual unit; 100% collection will prevent any bias in the record and misinterpretation of the material

2. Review and modify recovery techniques, especially during excavation. The excavator should be able to modify the collection strategy if special deposits are encountered. These include primary deposition of complete (or substantially complete) vessels, pottery associated with specific features such as graves or entrance ways and votive or structured deposits

3. Modifications to the collection strategy could include

   o the extension of the excavated area to determine the extent of significant deposits

   o the excavation of a higher or lower percentage of individual features than originally agreed in the project design

   o the use of sieving to recover as many finds as possible

- o recording pottery in situ, including on drawn plans, photography and in 3D; sherds from crushed vessels should be numbered and bagged individually, to aid post-investigation reconstruction, refit analysis and interpretation

4. Provide appropriately appointed, secure facilities and equipment for the cleaning, marking, labelling, documenting and packing of finds if these tasks are to take place on site

5. There should be suitable expertise and materials for the packing, stabilisation and lifting of fragile finds such as complete vessels or crushed pots

6. Label appropriately all material recovered by sieving

7. Ensure contact details for trained conservators to manage the packing, stabilisation and lifting of fragile finds are available

8. Review and modify the archive selection strategy as appropriate, ensuring that the requirements of the pottery specialist and the repository curator continue to be met

9. Establish procedures for the secure transport of finds off site, if processing is to take place elsewhere

Processing

Processing is the preparation of finds for storage and analysis. The aim is to compile a stable, clean, ordered and documented assemblage comprising 100% of all the pottery recovered from every contextual unit.

Before examination of the pottery can take place, all material recovered should be cleaned, marked or labelled and packed in accordance with current standards for good practice (eg *First Aid for Finds* (Watkinson and Neal 2001, new version due 2024) and requirements of the identified repository. If necessary, consult a pottery specialist for advice.

Cleaning

1. Most well-fired pottery can be washed in clean, lukewarm water, gently using a soft brush (a new toothbrush or nailbrush with no rubber bristles) or fingers to remove soil from surfaces

2. All surfaces should be carefully cleaned, including the edges of sherds

3. If the pottery looks as if it would be vulnerable to normal cleaning methods, use fingers to assess its stability. If, after gentle wiping, the surface comes away, do not wash but leave the pottery to air dry. It may then be cleaned with a soft brush or by a trained conservator

4. Pottery selected for analysis that has surface or absorbed residues, burnt deposits or soot may be air dried but not brushed, washed or overly handled, before being wrapped in tinfoil

5. Pottery should be left to dry thoroughly before being bagged in clean, dry bags or before any further work is carried out

6. It is not necessary for friable pottery to be consolidated with agents such as diluted PVA, unless it is at great risk and has not been selected for scientific analysis. Consult with a trained conservator

7. All methods used for cleaning should be recorded and made available to the pottery specialist

Marking

1. Most pottery can be marked by writing on the internal surface of the sherd or vessel

2. Use permanent black or white ink as appropriate to contrast with the surface colour

3. Mark in small, legible writing on the surface of the sherd, not on fractured surfaces that may be joined together at a later stage

4. Avoid marking over decoration, use-marks or surface residues

5. Mark every sherd (that is big enough) with project and contextual unit identifiers. If required by the archive repository, additional information may include the year and the repository accession number

6. Mark pottery that is a registered find (also known as a small find) with the registered find identifier

7. Mark pottery recovered from soil samples with the sample identifier

8. Pottery that cannot be marked directly – for example, because it is too small, too friable or has been retained unwashed – should be packed as directed in the *Packing* section below

9. Mark pottery before it is sent to a pottery specialist for analysis

Packing

1. Pack pottery in polythene bags of appropriate size and strength. Do not force sherds into bags of an unsuitably small size. Do not bag large heavy sherds (such as stoneware) together with small delicate sherds (such as porcelain)

2. Do not pack sherds that have been taped together. It is not advisable to tape sherds together at any stage other than during illustration and only then where the surfaces of the pot are hard enough to withstand the removal of the tape. Tape should never be left on sherds for any length of time

3. Wrap fragile sherds in acid-free tissue paper, bag separately and, if appropriate, box separately for protection

4. Pierce polythene bags to allow the contents to 'breathe'

5. Only bag together pottery that is from the same contextual unit

6. Write on the outside of the bag the site, contextual unit / registered find / sample identifiers and any other information required by the laboratory or the repository

7. Place two rot-proof labels in each bag, marked in permanent ink with the project and contextual unit / registered find / sample identifiers, as appropriate, together with any additional information required by the laboratory or the repository

8. Do not use metal fastenings, such as paper clips or staples, to secure bags because these will corrode and compromise other packing materials, unless it is a requirement of the receiving repository

9. Store bags in contextual unit identifier order in suitably sized, robust cardboard boxes that meet the requirements of the repository. Do not pack boxes so full that pottery is in danger of being crushed, or the box lid is not secure. If bags are likely to move around inside the box during transit, pad the contents with a suitable material such as bubble wrap or acid-free tissue

10. Mark boxes on one end using a permanent marker – or if in temporary storage, a pencil – with the site identifier, the material type of the contents and the relevant contextual unit /

registered find / sample identifiers. Boxes that will be transferred to a curatorial repository should be labelled or marked in accordance with their requirements

Documentation

1. Record pottery as part of the finds documentation procedure

2. Most pottery will be classified as a bulk find and the quantities present in each contextual unit should be recorded on bulk finds record sheets by material type (pottery), fragment count and weight in grams (see the Toolkit for Recording Archaeological Materials)

3. Record pottery that is a registered find in the registered finds index

4. Record pottery in lists of finds recovered from soil samples

5. Amend context and find records after assessment and analysis to include updated identifications. This might include, for example, changing a record from pottery to tile, or vice versa, or adding details of fabric or vessel types

6. Ensure adequate documentation relating to the movement of assemblages is maintained (eg within the project team, external specialists)

Recording

Recording an assemblage provides data that can be interpreted; reporting presents those data and interpretations. A stable, clean, ordered and documented assemblage is essential to enable each of these stages. The level to which the assemblage will be recorded and reported on will need to be decided based on a combination of the project design and the size and character of the assemblage.

A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology (PDF, Barclay et al 2016) describes basic and detailed methodologies for recording pottery assemblages. These were intended to be supported by a third recording methodology, undertaken at assessment stage, to determine the appropriate level of recording required at analysis.

The type of recording methodology deployed often relates directly to the type of report that will be written using these data. Since *A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology* (PDF, Barclay et al 2016) was published there have been advances in recommended good practice for specialist reporting; see The Toolkit for Specialist Reporting. This Toolkit details three reporting types (see Reporting for more information):

- Type 1: Description, for relatively insignificant assemblages

- Type 2: Appraisal, where there is the potential for further work

- Type 3: Full analysis, following detailed analysis of significant assemblages

These reporting types do not directly align with the three recording types detailed in *A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology* (PDF, Barclay et al 2016). This is particularly the case for the basic and detailed record, which may both be used for writing Type 1 or Type 3 reports. The specialist should consult with the project manager when deciding how to approach individual assemblages and mapping the recording methodology with the Toolkit report type, which should be based on a combination of the project design and the size and character of the assemblage.

This section on Recording and the section on Reporting have restructured content from sections 2.3 Assessment, 2.4 Analysis and 2.5 Reporting from *A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology* (PDF, Barclay et al 2016) and include references throughout to the Toolkit for Specialist Reporting. It is hoped that this will help guide a specialist's decision on recording methodology and report type.

Recording: Processes in pottery recording

Pottery recording produces a digital data record of the Pottery assemblage. Depending on the type of recording undertaken, this may constitute the final record or may form the preliminary dataset upon which recommendations for further work are based. These data may also be used by other project team members to inform fieldwork and/or post-excavation analysis. The pottery record should also be presented so as to ensure its long-term utility, for example by the inclusion of appropriate metadata – see the Toolkit for Managing Digital Data (Dig Digital).

Before any recording begins, the project manager should

1. contact the identified pottery specialists to agree the post-excavation timetable and establish effective communication

2. ensure that specialists have the information they need to undertake an appropriate level of recording and analysis, on time and within budget; this should ideally include as a minimum

   o the project brief and the project design, or the updated project design if a new version has been produced for the analysis and reporting stage

   o a site summary or interim report

   o the stratigraphic matrix

   o updated structural and phasing information

   o a copy of the site database or other concordance of relevant structural information for every contextual unit, providing information on context type, context group, feature type, fill of, site sub-division and stratigraphic phase

3. ensure that material sent to, and retrieved from, outside specialists is appropriately documented, packed, transported and tracked

4. establish who has responsibility for sending out and retrieving material for external specialists and who will cover the costs

Prior to recording, the pottery specialist should

1. re-familiarise themselves with the agreed research aims and methods, as defined in the project brief and the project design

2. re-familiarise themselves with the requirements of the data management plan

3. ensure that the recording method will be at the appropriate level for data to be analysed according to the project aims (eg more detailed analysis of firing for kiln assemblages) and depositional history of the site (eg more detailed recording of key stratigraphic groups), as well as for the interpretation of the assemblage in terms of pottery manufacture, distribution, acquisition and use

4. agree the project timetable with the project manager, identify critical points where information is needed from the project manager or from other specialists, or where finds or data need to be sent to other specialists (eg Samian pottery, stamped mortaria, scientific analysis or illustration)

5. ensure access to relevant national, regional and site-based fabric and form series (see Downloads and resources), using published literature and/or arranging visits to pottery type series; travel and any access charges should be paid by the project, as agreed in the assessment

6. locate and, where necessary, separate out material for further treatment, eg photography, drawing or scientific analysis

7. determine how the pottery will be packed after analysis, following the guidelines of the repository that will curate the project archive. It is usual for most of the pottery to be boxed in contextual unit identifier order but ensure that diagnostic material (eg fabric type sherds and illustrated sherds) can be easily located; decide also, in consultation with the repository, whether or not to bag different wares or fabrics separately within each contextual unit

8. ensure that material to be sent to other specialists, or returned to the project manager, is appropriately documented, packed and transported (CIfA 2014a, 3.7.5)

9. ensure that appropriate facilities, properly equipped, secure and with sufficient space and light, are available for undertaking the work (CIfA 2014a, Annex 1)

During recording the pottery specialist should

1. sort every sherd in a contextual unit according to each different attribute, eg a pile of plain body sherds of Fabric 1, two plain everted rim sherds in Fabric 1 with the same rim diameter, a body sherd in Fabric 1 that has an incised wavy line on the body, a pile of plain body sherds in Fabric 6, a pile of body sherds in Fabric 6 that have an internal clear glaze, and so on. See also guidance from PCRG, SGRP and MLPRG

2. ensure each data entry refers to these groupings that share the same attributes of fabric, form, dimensions, surface treatment, etc

3. ensure data is recorded using consistent terminology, so that the same attributes are recorded in the same ways every time

4. ensure the pottery record is in digital form, in a database or spreadsheet that is created and managed in accordance with the data management plan

5. ensure any codes used in creating the record (eg fabric codes, field names) are supported by a concordance of codes and full descriptive terms; the format of this concordance (ie paper/digital) should adhere to the repository requirements for inclusion in the project archive

At the end of recording the pottery specialist should

1. clean the digital record to remove any inconsistencies (eg in the varied use of capital letters within text fields, such as POTTERY, Pottery, pottery)

2. provide documentation, compile metadata or clean the digital record to convert codes into full descriptive terms (eg to ensure future users can understand that SVW OX1 means Severn Valley Oxidised ware 1)

Recording: Appraisal/assessment record

Full pottery analysis is often preceded by an appraisal/assessment stage. Assessment is an intermediate stage between excavation and analysis/reporting and is applicable to all aspects of an archaeological project (ie in the context of excavation, it is applied to artefacts and environmental data as well as the contextual record).

The data collected during this stage can be the basis of a CIfA Type 2 report (see Appraisal/assessment (Type 2) in the Reporting section of this Toolkit, and the Advisory Checklist in the *Toolkit for Specialist Reporting*); this will help to determine the appropriate level of further analysis and reporting and to ensure that it is properly resourced, and/or provide basic information to inform other project tasks.

It is often the case, however, that small assemblages do not require assessment because it is often easy to establish what level of recording is required. In such instances it is recommended that the project proceeds directly to analysis, recording using either the basic and detailed record for the completion of either a Type 1 or Type 3 report.

Aims

1. Establish the size and broad character of the assemblage

2. Determine the level of analysis needed

3. Enable accurate estimation of the resources required for analysis

4. Provide sufficient information about the pottery (often chronological, ie spot dating) to facilitate other project tasks such as stratigraphic phasing or further archaeological mitigation

Method

Only begin the assessment after all finds have been processed. Assess the entire assemblage, including unstratified material.

The ideal approach is to lay out as much of the assemblage as possible at a time, in contextual unit identifier order. The material can then be reviewed and a record made of the pottery in each contextual unit, either as notes or in a more structured format.

Avoid generating data ('intermediate' levels of data generation and analysis) that cannot be carried forward to analysis. Such work can consume significant project resources with no benefit beyond this initial assessment stage itself. Also avoid generating data that will be recorded more fully in analysis. There may be no need, for instance, to record individual ware or fabric types as detailed quantities, although it is usually helpful to record quantities of broad categories, such as ware groups (eg late medieval sandy).

See Downloads and resources for the Pottery record template, which includes Spot date, Basic record and Detailed record form templates.

- assessment record should include

    o the ware types present in each contextual unit

    o unusual vessel forms

    o comment on the condition of the pottery, where relevant, such as the degree of fragmentation or abrasion

    o the chronological range of the pottery in each contextual unit

    o an estimated date of deposition, usually a terminus post quem, for each contextual unit

    o an estimated date of creation for each feature

    o the quantity of pottery in each contextual unit, usually derived from the bulk finds record; it should not be necessary to carry out quantification during assessment

Results

A digital record including

1. a broad description and quantification of the pottery in every contextual unit

2. the date range of the pottery in every contextual unit, based on the types present

3. an estimated date of deposition for every contextual unit

Assessment also provides an opportunity to sort out finds that have been misidentified, such as fragments of tile that were originally recorded as pottery.

Recording: Basic Record

The **basic record** is a rapid analysis that is detailed enough to produce a report that will inform an understanding of the site and any structural evidence, as well as indicate the significance of the pottery assemblage as evidence for site activities, modes of distribution, and social and economic conditions.

If the entire assemblage has already been assessed, unstratified material can be excluded from further analysis, although it should be available for study, eg to match cross-fitting sherds. If there has been no assessment, unstratified material should be scanned to record the presence of unusual or significant types.

It is possible to produce a basic record for part of an assemblage, while selected groups are the subject of a detailed record. The assessment exercise will identify which parts of an assemblage merit which type of record.

Aims

1. Characterise an assemblage rapidly and in sufficient detail to produce a meaningful, publishable project report

2. Quantify an assemblage rapidly and in sufficient detail to produce a meaningful, publishable report that could contribute to broad synthetic studies

Method

Record data using consistent terminology, so that the same attributes are recorded in the same ways every time. The methods listed below are described in more detail in Approaches to recording. See Downloads and resources for the Pottery record template, which includes the Basic record form template.

1. Characterise and sort the pottery according to these criteria:

   o contextual unit identifier

   o ware name, ware type or ware group (eg Ipswich ware, oxidised sandy ware, white ware, amphorae) in accordance with relevant local fabric type series

   o full fabric identification may be appropriate at this basic level for some assemblages, especially for prehistoric material

   o ware date range (the earliest date and the latest date)

   o sherd type (rim, body, base, etc)

   o vessel class (bowl, flagon, jar, jug, etc)

   o vessel type, where appropriate (eg Samian forms)

   o vessel size (usually by rim diameter)

- o surface treatment (burnishing, glaze, etc)
- o decoration (method and motif)

2. Quantify the pottery by

- o sherd count
- o sherd weight in grams
- o number of vessels (eg Estimated Vessel Equivalent, such as rim EVE based on rim percentage; maximum vessel count; minimum vessel count)

3. Note specific features of the assemblage:

- o cross-fitting sherds from different contextual units and joins within context
- o evidence for use (sooting, limescale, wear marks, etc)
- o sherd condition (abraded, water-worn, freshly broken)

4. Identify and separate pieces that require

- o illustration or photography
- o scientific analysis

Results

1. A digital basic record of the pottery in every stratified contextual unit
2. Pottery selected for scientific analysis and/or illustration

Recording: Detailed Record

The purpose of the **detailed record** is to provide as much information as possible about the character and quantity of the assemblage, to a level sufficient to inform site-specific, local, regional, national and international studies of pottery technology, distribution, acquisition, use and deposition through time, at the levels of specific fabrics, through ware types to traditions and styles. Detailed recording should also enable the comparison of the pottery with assemblages of other types of finds, as well as informing interpretations of the site, the character of specific features and contexts, and the structural sequence.

Aims

1. Characterise an assemblage in as much detail as possible

2. Quantify an assemblage to as high a level as possible

Method

The methods listed below are described in more detail in Approaches to recording. See Downloads and resources for the Pottery record template, which includes the Detailed record form template.

1. Characterise and sort the pottery according to these criteria:

   o contextual unit identifier

   o fabric type, in accordance with relevant fabric type series

   o ware name/group to which that fabric type belongs

   o ware date range (the earliest date and the latest date)

   o sherd type (rim, body, base, etc)

   o vessel class (bowl, flagon, jar, jug, etc)

   o vessel form (carinated bowl, pear-shaped jug, etc)

   o the form of component parts (rims, bases, feet, handles, spouts, etc)

   o vessel size, by rim diameter, height (for complete profiles), and if it adds useful information, base diameter

   o vessel wall thickness and girth – record these for prehistoric pottery

   o surface treatment (burnishing, glaze, etc), by technique, character (eg glaze colour) and position on the vessel; for glaze also record whether it is splashed, run or covers the whole surface

   o decoration, by technique, motif, and position on the vessel (where this is not already defined by the form/sherd type)

- o non-decorative deliberate modifications such as potter's stamps, post-firing tally/merchant marks, graffiti or repairs
- o method of manufacture (hand-built, moulded, wheel-thrown), where not defined by the fabric type/description
- o evidence for use (sooting, limescale, wear marks, etc)
- o cross-fitting sherds from different contextual units and joins within the same context
- o sherd condition (abraded, burned, water-worn, freshly broken)

2. Quantify the pottery by

- o sherd count
- o sherd weight in grams
- o number of vessels (eg Estimated Vessel Equivalent or EVE, maximum vessel count, minimum vessel count; see Approaches to recording)

3. Identify and separate pieces that require

- o illustration or photography
- o scientific analysis

Results

1. A digital detailed record of the pottery in every selected contextual unit
2. Pottery selected for scientific analysis and/or illustration

Reporting

Different types of pottery reports will be appropriate depending on the project design, the project life cycle, and the assemblage itself. The Toolkit for Specialist Reporting separates these into three types of reports and contains an Advisory checklist explaining what each type should include:

- Type 1: Description, for relatively insignificant assemblages

- Type 2: Appraisal/assessment, where there is the potential for further work

- Type 3: Full analysis, following detailed analysis of significant assemblages

There are differences between a Type 2 report (Appraisal/assessment), and Types 1 (Description) and 3 (Full analysis). A Type 2 report focuses on establishing the potential of the assemblage for further work and determining the level of analysis required – and the resources required to perform that analysis. It informs the type of recording – basic or detailed, or a mixture applied to different aspects of the assemblage – and reporting that is appropriate depending on the project design, the size and character of the assemblage, and the wider project aims. A Type 2 report may not be necessary for certain assemblages if it is clear to the specialist what level of recording and reporting is required and the resources to do so are already available.

Type 1 and Type 3 reports use the data recorded via the basic or detailed record to inform particular lines of enquiry, presenting the results of that analysis and providing text that describes the processes and results of data-gathering, analysis and interpretation. A Type 3 pottery report brings together all the strands of evidence gathered up to that point. The overall aim is to describe the assemblage, present the data collected during analysis, set out how those data have been interpreted and relate the evidence to such things as interpretations of the pottery assemblage, the evidence of other finds, the structural evidence of the site and the character of the site as a whole, eg as a dwelling, industrial site or shipwreck. See Approaches to reporting for more detailed information on what to include.

For all types of report, a pottery specialist has an obligation to present their results in such a way that the data can be disseminated and are easily accessible for use in wider studies, and the conclusions can be re-worked by other researchers. As such, a report should consist of descriptive text, tables and illustrations and clearly relate to the material archive in order to facilitate access to pottery for future researchers. Adopting consistent methods of presentation, eg in the composition of data tables and illustrations, facilitates the comparison of different reports.

If the decision is made to produce a synthetic or integrated report then an associated specialist report should also be produced for the project archive, to be made available through online resources such as the Archaeology Data Service, the project website or other digital media.

Processes in pottery reporting

Before reporting begins, the project manager should ensure that the pottery specialist

1. has a copy of the latest version of the project design

2. is aware of the timetable and deadlines for completing the report

3. has all the information required to interpret the assemblage (see [Processes in pottery recording](#)) according to the level of report commissioned. This could additionally include site structural details (eg final site matrix and phasing), results of analysis of associated assemblages (eg ceramic building material, clay pipes, coins), and the absolute dates (eg from radiocarbon analysis) of any [contextual units](#)

In addition, for Type 3 level reporting, the project manager should ensure that the pottery specialist

4. has copies of all pottery illustrations

5. has the data resulting from analysis elsewhere, eg by a Samian specialist or from scientific analysis

Prior to reporting the pottery specialist should

1. ensure that they have been provided with all the information they need, as listed above

2. ensure that the report is created in digital form in accordance with the data management plan

3. liaise with any scientific analysts on the requirements for reporting and making the results available

4. liaise with illustrators on specific requirements

Sources

A report should identify and reference

1. any standards and accepted methodologies used in the analysis, recording and interpretation of the pottery

2. accepted typologies and [type series](#) used to characterise the pottery (see [Downloads and resources](#))

3. key assemblages used to uphold or enhance the characterisation and interpretation of the pottery

4. published reports or research articles that have informed the interpretation of the assemblage

5. relevant national, regional, period and pottery research frameworks (see [Downloads and resources](#))

Dissemination

Pottery reports are often presented as separate sections or chapters within site or project reports. The pottery specialist should be consulted during any editing of their original text. The pottery specialist should also be notified of the publication of the project, whether in physical or digital form, and sent copies of the published material.

If passages of the full report are used to compile an integrated pottery or finds report, the pottery specialist should be consulted to ensure the content accurately reflects their original text and given the opportunity to make amendments if necessary.

Authorship should be credited to the pottery specialist throughout.

Copyright laws and regulations should be observed throughout and copyright should be agreed between the commissioning body and the pottery specialist.

Appraisal/assessment (Type 2)

This type of report focuses on establishing the potential of the assemblage for further work and determining the level of analysis required – and the resources needed to perform that analysis. As per the Toolkit for Specialist Reporting, a Type 2 report will 'usually be based on a record of the character and quantity of the assemblage and consider its quality in relation to states of preservation, chronological coherency, site formation processes, types of objects present and interpretations of social and economic conditions.' In this regard, it contains information not required in a Type 1 or Type 3 report.

For pottery assemblages, Appraisal/assessment reports should also provide sufficient information about the pottery (often chronological) to facilitate other project tasks such as stratigraphic phasing or further archaeological mitigation.

The report should meet the requirements of the Toolkit for Specialist Reporting Type 2 Advisory checklist. It should include

1. a summary of the overall character and significance of the assemblage, highlighting groups that are of particular interest

2. a discussion of the levels of analysis required for the overall assemblage and specific parts, such as key groups or site phases

3. a written assessment of the potential of the pottery to address or contribute to the research aims of the project.

4. a written assessment of potential to address questions that relate specifically to the pottery, whether defined at the site assemblage level (eg what is the evidence for pottery production and how important is this within the socio-economic framework of the site?) or more widely (eg how does the present assemblage contribute to understanding of the regional distribution of ware x?)

5. a detailed definition and quantification of component tasks for specialist analysis and reporting

Once the potential has been established and resulting research questions defined, the scope and level of analysis required has to be determined. Specialist time and other resource allocations need to be made for all the necessary component tasks of recording, interpretation and reporting, including illustration and any additional specialist work such as scientific analysis.

Description (Type 1)

Type 1 reports are intended for relatively insignificant assemblages. Assemblages may be considered insignificant for example because of the way in which they were recovered (eg a watching brief has recorded little associated structural evidence) or because they are badly fragmented and mostly redeposited. As such, the level of recording will necessarily be limited, likely using the basic record, but still be detailed enough to produce a report that will inform an understanding of the site and any structural evidence. This type of recording and reporting is not ideal and should be uncommon. See the [Advisory checklist](#) in the [Toolkit for Specialist Reporting](#) for what needs to be included.

For certain assemblages, a Type 1 report may replace the need for a Type 2 report where it is clear to the specialist prior to assessment which recording methodology and report type is most appropriate.

Full analysis (Type 3)

A Type 3 report provides a comprehensive interpretation of a pottery assemblage, in accordance with the recommendations made during assessment and the aims and objectives stated in the project design and post-excavation methodology. Type 3 reports will provide information about the character and quantity of the assemblage, to a level sufficient to inform site-specific, local, regional, national and international studies of pottery technology, distribution, acquisition, use and deposition through time, at the levels of specific [fabrics](#), through [ware types](#) to traditions and styles. Detailed analysis should also enable the comparison of the pottery with assemblages of other types of finds, as well as informing interpretations of the site, the character of specific features and contexts, and the structural sequence.

The report should meet the requirements of the [Toolkit for Specialist Reporting](#) Type 3 [Advisory checklist](#).

Content

The pottery report should include any or all of the following depending whether it is a Type 1, 2 or 3 report. The list below provides the content from section 2.5.5 in *[A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology](#)* (PDF, Barclay et al 2016), with additional content and headings from the [Toolkit for Specialist Reporting](#)'s Advisory checklist. See the [Advisory checklist](#) to identify which of the following to include for the type of report you are producing.

Document information

1. title of report incorporating subject and project name, name of author (including qualifications), date of data collection/recording, date of analysis/report completion

Introduction

2. an introduction to the nature of the assemblage, including total quantities
3. the aims of the report

Methodology

4. a description of the recording system used, including where different levels of analysis have been applied to different parts of the assemblage

5. a description of any sampling strategy or method of recovery employed

6. the methods of analysis employed

7. the method of quantification employed

8. full integration of any scientific analysis

Quantification

9. quantification of assemblage by fragment count and weight as a minimum

10. higher-level quantification by at least one other appropriate and defined method (eg Estimated Vessel Equivalent (EVE), Minimum Number of Vessels (MNV), Estimated (or Maximum) Number of Vessels (ENV); see Approaches to recording)

Characterisation

11. description of fabric types and/or ware types, depending on the level of analysis employed

12. description of the vessels present in each fabric/ware type, including where possible:

   o methods of manufacture

   o form types

   o surface treatment

   o decoration

   o size ranges

   o evidence for use

Contextualisation

13. discussion of evidence for pottery disposal and site formation processes, based on sherd condition and fragmentation

Interpretation

14. a detailed discussion of the assemblage in its own terms, including the relative proportions of different fabrics, wares and vessel types of different dates

15. a discussion and assessment of the assemblage in its local, regional and wider economic and social context

16. a discussion of the assemblage as evidence for the way of life represented at the site over time, including how pottery was obtained and utilised

17. references to other evidence from the site and a discussion of the significance of the pottery alongside objects made of other materials

Significance, potential and recommendations

18. statement of significance and potential of material/assemblage

19. statement of contribution of material/assemblage to project research aims

20. statement of contribution to national/regional/period/pottery research frameworks

21. statement of new material/assemblage-led research aims

22. recommendation for further recording and analysis

23. recommendation for illustration

Presentation

24. an illustrated catalogue

25. photographs or other illustrations of individual vessels or groups

26. tabulated data and, where appropriate, graphs

27. bibliographic references

28. acknowledgements

29. if necessary, for instance if it is not mentioned elsewhere in the publication, the location of the archive, including scientific specimens

Archive

Every archaeological project must produce *a stable, ordered, accessible archive* and transfer it to a curated collection for long-term storage and access in accordance with the *[Standard and guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives](#)* (CIfA 2014b). Those engaged in the recovery, processing, assessment, recording, analysis and/or reporting of [pottery assemblages](#) should ensure that the archival integrity of the material is maintained in accordance with national and local standards and the requirements of the project. That applies equally to digital and documentary material and to the pottery and associated specimens (eg thin-sections).

The pottery assemblage is one component of a larger project archive that as a whole will be subject to recognised standards and requirements for management and compilation (see Brown 2011; Perrin 2014; CIfA 2014b). Those standards should be used to inform project planning and the subsequent treatment of all potential archive components, including pottery and associated documents and digital material (see the [Toolkit for Managing Digital Data (Dig Digital)](#)).

Selection is an important part of the creation and compilation of an archive – see the [Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives](#). It is the process of deciding which components of the documentary and material elements are to be retained for curation. This can result in omitting certain items from the archive, such as duplicates of digital files, or some unstratified objects. It is not the function of this Toolkit to describe the creation and development of a selection strategy, nor to state categorically what pottery finds can or cannot be excluded from selection. Selection should be based, however, on the premise that every pottery find has the potential to inform future research and a strong case has to be made for not selecting pottery for archive. Pottery specialists are able to inform the selection process, and it is important to consult them, but their role is essentially to report on an assemblage to the best of their abilities, in the knowledge that future researchers will be able to revisit and reinterpret the material they have studied. **It is therefore advised that in most cases, pottery that has been analysed, or has the potential to reward analysis or re-analysis, should be selected for archive**. Any decisions on selection made throughout the life cycle of the project should be recorded in line with the [Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives](#).

The principles described in this section of the Toolkit apply to all archaeological archives but are worth considering here in relation to pottery.

Archiving is a continuous process throughout the course of a project and includes activities, such as cleaning and marking, that take place at different times but with the long-term aim of ensuring the security and accessibility of the material in long-term curation. Archiving requirements can therefore follow the same structure as a project and are thus arranged here under the headings of 'Project planning, data-gathering and recording', 'Reporting', and 'Archive compilation and transfer'.

Project planning, data-gathering and recording

Project planning

As described in [Project planning](#), the key to successful archiving is to address the issue at the project planning stage. It is then that recovery and recording methodologies, selection strategies, data management plans and repository requirements should be agreed and understood, incorporated into [project designs](#) and transmitted to specialists.

Collection and processing

Follow agreed standards, methods and materials for the recovery, cleaning, marking/labelling, packing and documentation of pottery, as set out in the sections on [Collection](#) and [Processing](#).

Recording

The recording stage is one where pottery can be sent to a variety of different specialists in several locations. It is important that this is managed to ensure the ongoing stability and security of the material and the successful collection and integration of the results.

1. Document the movement of pottery to ensure that its whereabouts is known at all times

2. Ensure that specialists and scientific analysts comply with recognised standards of object care

3. Ensure type series and specimens created during analysis are included in the project archive

4. Entrust the task of transporting pottery only to project staff or professional carriers qualified in the movement of fragile goods

5. Submit all records and reports created during analysis, both physical and digital, for inclusion in the project archive – see the [Toolkit for Managing Digital Data (Dig Digital)](#) for more information

Reporting

Specialist pottery reports often take one of two forms. One is a separate document written by the analyst as a full description and interpretation of the data they have collected, the other is a chapter or section within a larger project report, often accompanied by drawings and photographs. Sometimes the full specialist report is incorporated into the project report; sometimes it is abbreviated or re-written. If a report is edited or rewritten, it should be approved by the original author before publication/dissemination.

In either case it is highly likely that the full specialist report has been created digitally and it should be included in the project's digital archive to remain accessible for further study. The location of these reports should be signposted in the publication, especially if the reports have been heavily abstracted. Project managers, or post-excavation managers, should ensure that external specialists submit all their data, associated glossaries or keys, versions of their report and any other relevant material.

Archive components resulting from the reporting stage that should be incorporated into the project archive include

1. a clean copy of the data recorded by the specialist; this will usually be in the form of a digital file, either a spreadsheet or database

2. a concordance of all the codes used during recording and their meanings

3. the metadata associated with the recording form (ie description of fields used, etc)

4. selected copies of drafts, together with the final version, of the full specialist report; it is worth considering retaining some early draft reports if these further illuminate the process of arriving at the final interpretations

5. original versions of all drawings, which are likely to be in ink, on card or film; these should be included in the documentary archive

6. original versions of all photographs: negatives or transparencies will be incorporated into the documentary archive, but most publication photographs are now likely to be digital, and the original file (check format with repository), should be included in the digital archive; it is not acceptable to assume that photographs incorporated into document files, such as .pdfs, will be archived in that form

7. the publication version of the specialist report, especially if this has been created as a separate file for later incorporation into the final project report

Archive compilation and transfer

Compilation

This is the stage when documentary material and finds are packed and the digital archive organised for transfer to an archive repository. This will usually be carried out to standards that should have been agreed during project planning. The principal tasks are usually to

1. ensure that archive selection of finds, documents and digital files has been completed in accordance with the selection strategy and the requirements of archive repositories; the aim is to create an archive that will inform future study

2. ensure finds are packed by contextual unit, in secure bags that contain rot-proof labels marked with the site and contextual unit identifiers

3. ensure boxes of the size required by the repository are used and labelled in accordance with their system

4. ensure finds are boxed in contextual unit identifier order

5. ensure specimens created for scientific analysis (eg thin-section slides) are included in the archive, or their location (eg in a laboratory instead of a museum store) is fully documented

6. establish whether or not it is required that illustrated or scientifically analysed specimens are boxed separately, and respond accordingly

7. compile a box list to enable access to particular finds

8. compile hard copy documents by type (record sheets, indexes, etc) and bundle them in a logical order (eg arrange individual record sheets in order of contextual unit)

9. box documents by type in boxes of the size required by the repository

10. order photographic items in a logical and accessible way (eg by photographic index number)

11. use recognised archival materials for the packing and storage of photographic materials, including prints, negatives and transparencies, as specified in national and international standards

12. ensure the archive includes indexes to all the documentary material and an overall contents list

13. ensure all digital data has been cleaned to be consistent and free from error

14. ensure all digital files are named in accordance with the convention agreed in the data management plan

15. follow the requirements of the data management plan (see the Toolkit for Managing Digital Data (Dig Digital)) in ordering digital material in a clearly identified and accessible directory structure

16. compile a digital archive index to accompany the digital archive

17. ensure the digital archive is included for submission to the Trusted Digital Repository by whatever transfer method identified in project planning in line with what is specified by the repository

Archive transfer

It is most likely that the entire project archive will be transferred together, and the pottery, with associated records, will be a component of that. In all cases, however, archive transfer should be pre-arranged with the repository and carried out by project staff or recognised professional carriers who specialise in the delivery of fragile goods for museum collections.

Approaches to Recording

This section provides more detailed methodological guidance on recording pottery.

The following attributes may be recorded during analysis:

- fabric

- vessel type

- the form of component parts

- sherd type

- decoration

- surface treatment

- vessel size

- source

- method of manufacture

- evidence for use

- condition

The advised method is to sort every sherd in a contextual unit according to each different attribute, resulting in, for example, a pile of plain body sherds of Fabric 1, two plain everted rim sherds in Fabric 1 with the same rim diameter, a body sherd in Fabric 1 that has an incised wavy line on the body, a pile of plain body sherds in Fabric 6, a pile of body sherds in Fabric 6 that have an internal clear glaze, and so on.

Fabric type

The purpose of fabric characterisation is to determine the likely location of the production site at which that item was made.

Pottery fabrics should be distinguished on the basis of the character of the clay and inclusions, in accordance with accepted methods (Orton and Hughes 2013). Reference should always be made to existing, relevant, local, regional or national pottery type series or PTS (CIfA 2014a, 3.7.4) and their terminology and coding systems should always be followed. Concordance should be provided where more than one appropriate fabric series exists (eg local and national).

Add previously unrecognised fabrics or significant variations of known fabrics to any actively curated PTS, with specimen sherds offered and specimens selected for petrographic/chemical analysis, as agreed in the updated project design. Describe new fabrics in full.

If specimen sherds have been removed from the stored assemblage, leave proxy documentation in the original box or bag to show that the contents are incomplete.

Where no appropriate PTS exists, compile a project-specific series. Specimen sherds of each type, supported by full written descriptions, should be set aside and reserved in the archive.

Fabric descriptions, both macroscopic and microscopic (X10 or X20), should be recorded in standard format (PCRG 2010, 22–29, Appendices 1–8; Tomber and Dore 1998, 4–8; Orton and Hughes 2013). Concordance should be provided with appropriate regional or national fabric series where possible.

Fabric recording systems should allow for fabrics to be grouped and quantified by broad class, whether based on main inclusions (eg flint, grog, etc for prehistoric pottery) or general type (eg oxidised, reduced, colour-coated, blackware, tin-glazed, etc). This can be achieved using an alpha-numeric system (PCRG 2010, Appendix 1 and various county-/unit-specific fabric type series) or by recording fabric class separately. This hierarchical approach facilitates inter-regional comparison (Doherty 2015, 21) and also allows for different levels of recording to be undertaken, as appropriate. Where practical, fabrics should be defined in consultation with local geology maps for a 10 km radius, to identify local clays and tempers.

Use petrographic analysis for checking and refining fabric descriptions determined with a binocular microscope.

Vessel form

The aim of form analysis is to define the vessel type and component parts.

All recognisable forms of vessels and component parts should be recorded within fabric groups by contextual unit.

Where appropriate, use the *Guide to the Classification of Medieval Ceramic Forms* (MPRG 1998) at all stages of analysis. This classification provides a nationally accepted standard terminology for medieval and early post-medieval forms, avoiding confusion and facilitating inter-site and inter-regional comparison.

Record vessel types using a hierarchy of

- vessel class (eg bowl, jar, jug, etc)
- vessel type (eg carinated bowl, rounded jar, ring-necked flagon, etc) where possible

Form type codes should conform to extant local/regional **form reference series**. Where these exist and are published, and forms are well defined, detailed form descriptions are not required. Concordance may need to be provided if more than one appropriate form type series exists (eg local and national).

Form elements (eg rim, base, handle) should be recorded for new types or for kiln assemblages.

Decoration

Decoration and form are closely related, given that the type of vessel usually determines the nature and positioning of the decoration.

Decoration is usually carried out before firing, and can be divided into three components:

- technique (eg incised, impressed, applied)
- motif (eg wavy horizontal lines, cross-shaped, scales)

- position (eg on the rim, body, handle)

Record each of these in separate fields on a record sheet, spreadsheet or database. Use standard terminology, where this exists (PCRG 2010, 33; MPRG 1998; Webster 1976).

Vessel size

Vessel size is usually determined by measuring the external diameter of the rim in millimetres. The hand-built nature of the majority of prehistoric pottery (particularly of the Neolithic and Bronze Age) means that rim circumference can be irregular, and a minimum and maximum diameter may need to be recorded.

Bases are not usually typologically sensitive, so diameters of bases only need to be recorded where this is justified by the project aims and objectives (for example in a kiln assemblage where this might help to characterise the range and level of standardisation of kiln products).

Record vessel height when a total profile is present.

Girth and vessel wall thickness are usually recorded only for prehistoric pottery (PCRG 2010, 32–3).

Surface treatment

Record surface treatment for any techniques that are carried out before firing; this includes the use of a slip or glaze, wiping, burnishing, knife-trimming, finger smearing, scratch-marking, etc.

As with decoration, it is advisable to record the technique and the position separately.

Some fabrics are differentiated on the basis of their appearance (eg cream-slipped ware, Black-burnished ware), in which case it is not necessary to record surface treatment.

Evidence for manufacture

Methods of manufacture include

- vessel manufacture (eg hand-built, wheel-thrown, moulded), although this is often included in the description of a fabric, so need not be recorded separately

- forming and attaching component parts (eg pulled rod handle, luted wheel-thrown strap handle)

- manufacturing faults (eg warping, bloating, cracking)

Evidence for use

The ways a vessel was used can leave evidence such as wear marks, leaching and residues (eg soot, limescale, food deposits).

Record both the position (including whether internal or external) and extent of evidence for use.

Post-firing modifications

Record all elements such as graffiti, tally marks, ownership marks, perforations and repairs by their position and technique. Lettering should also be transcribed into the record.

Quantification

The aim of quantification is to determine the relative amounts of each different type, sorted according to the attributes described above, that are present in a single contextual unit. This will lead to an understanding of which types are prevalent in specific features and structural phases as well as across the site as a whole. The aim is to enable the investigation and comparison of the populations of different pottery types in order to inform questions of chronology, use, social and economic conditions and site formation processes.

As noted by Orton, Tyers and Vince in 1993 (166), 'This is a subject which has often generated more heat than light in recent years.' This statement remains true more than 30 years later. Varying approaches have been used by different period specialists as well as those working within the same period, sometimes even within the same region (Doherty 2015, 9). However, this is an area where consistency, at least within period specialisms, is necessary to achieve meaningful comparison between site assemblages. The level of quantification will depend on the aims and objectives of the project, balanced with the condition of the assemblage and the character of the archaeological deposits. Cost and time should not be the determining factor and adequate time should have been agreed for the appropriate level of quantification; in fact, more time is actually spent on the initial sorting than on recording (Darling 1994, 4).

The main methods of quantification are

- sherd count – to the nearest sherd, not in estimated quantities of fives or tens; count freshly broken sherds as one

- sherd weight – to the nearest gram

- vessel count – usually an estimate. It is often helpful to use two methods (see below), such as rim EVE together with Maximum (or Minimum) Vessel Count, to give a more informed estimate of the vessel population. Rim EVE will often give an estimated vessel count that is much lower than the Maximum (or Minimum) Vessel Count

There are a number of ways to obtain vessel counts. An actual count is highly unlikely, especially in large assemblages, but can occasionally be achieved on sites such as shipwrecks, where pots may be easier to identify separately.

The usual method is to calculate an Estimated Vessel Equivalent (EVE) based on rim percentage, recorded using a rim chart (Orton and Hughes 2013). Bases can also be measured to provide a base EVE, although this is usually only appropriate on pottery production sites, where there are large amounts of material to be quantified.

In prehistoric assemblages it is not always possible to produce rim and base EVEs because pots are not always entirely regular in form, so other methods of acquiring an estimated vessel count may be more appropriate.

It is possible to produce an Estimated (or Maximum) Vessel Count (ENV), where every sherd counts as one vessel unless it either fits with another sherd or is demonstrably part of the same vessel as other sherds. This often becomes apparent during sorting without too much extra effort. If two sherds do join together, they count as one vessel. The Minimum Number of Vessels (MNV) assumes, wherever possible, that groups of sherds of the same fabric belong to the same vessel.

Other objective methods for quantifying vessels have been proposed, each with advantages and disadvantages (Orton, Tyers and Vince 1993, chapter 13; Orton 1993). It is most important that there is clear, consistent guidance from specialist groups on the agreed approach for each period.

Date

For some assemblages, the earliest date (terminus post quem) and latest date (terminus ante quem) of a given type, as differentiated during sorting, may be recorded. Note any sherds that can be identified as residual or intrusive, given the character of the rest of the pottery in the context, as they may assist in understanding depositional processes and the reliability of pottery groups.

Additional information

Additional information to be recorded includes

- cross-context joins, where two sherds from different contextual units fit together

- evidence for re-use, such as turning pottery sherds into spindle whorls, counters or lids

- sherd condition, recorded in terms of type, position and extent; this provides evidence of breakage and post-deposition activity, and includes abrasion, burning, leaching or being water-worn

Sherd selection

Record which sherds or vessels have been selected for further treatment, such as drawing, photography or scientific analysis.

Comments

Record any observations or notes that do not relate to the sorting of pottery for quantification in a free text field.

The record

In the past, specialists would record onto paper pro forma, which more recently have then been entered into digital databases, but it is now common practice to enter data directly into a database or spreadsheet. In either instance, it is essential to list all codes used to denote fabric

or form types, or any other attribute, in a glossary or concordance that provides the full meaning. This concordance forms part of the metadata that should be supplied with all digital records, detailing the data fields recorded and software packages used.

Recorded data should be accessible to other people and steps should be taken to ensure that it remains so. It is advisable to follow guidelines provided by the Archaeology Data Service.

Approaches to Reporting

This section provides more detailed methodological guidance for reporting on pottery.

A report on any pottery assemblage should aim to describe it, quantify it and interpret the results of analysis. The contents of the three types of pottery reports are set out in the Reporting section of the Toolkit, but some aspects are given further explanation here.

Describing the assemblage

Present all the attributes on which the assemblage was sorted, with the range of wares, fabrics, vessel forms and decorative styles.

Describe the assemblage in a catalogue, accompanied by illustrations (drawings and/or photographs). The catalogue should be representative of the whole assemblage, covering characteristic traits, and giving the range of forms and types present. Arrange it to complement the text and any phasing/stratigraphic grouping. The extent of the catalogue will depend on the rarity and importance of the material described.

Most catalogues are arranged around

- ware and/or fabric types
- form types
- key feature/context groups

The catalogue should present key attributes (contextual unit, type, form, fabric, decoration, surface treatment, sample reference – eg, lipid residue, object or pottery record number) in a standardised format with any abbreviations/codes explained in full in a key. Where an illustrated sherd has been used for petrographic or scientific analysis, the sample reference should be given in the catalogue.

If the sherd or an attribute has been photographed, the appropriate illustrative plate should be cross-referenced.

All the terms used in descriptions of fabrics, forms, decoration and other attributes should be used consistently, and if necessary, explained in glossaries or concordances.

Describe fabrics with reference to other known examples or type series, using the accepted nomenclature. Give full descriptions of previously unpublished fabric and form types following accepted principles (eg PCRG 2010; Darling 1994; Slowikowski et al. 2001). Where a new type series is defined, it may be appropriate to give a correlation with previously used typologies. Present fabric descriptions in standardised form following period group guidance (see PCRG 2010). Where petrological analysis has taken place, integrate and cross-reference the results and state the sample reference. Petrological descriptions should follow standard practice (PCRG 2010; Peacock 1977).

Describe vessel forms and the form of component parts, decoration or surface treatment using accepted terminology and systems of classification (eg MPRG 1988).

Describe, quantify and discuss additional attributes, such as surface treatment, evidence of use, signs of modification and methods of manufacture, in the context of other attributes. If considered appropriate, specific examples should be illustrated.

Integrate the results of scientific analysis for use with other lines of evidence for the same phenomena, eg when using lipid analysis to identify food residues.

Describe the condition of the material, leading to examination of the evidence relating to fragmentation, redeposition, and waste management and site formation processes. Give a statement covering the overall stratigraphic integrity of the assemblage and its reliability to date features, in particular where material is thought to be residual, intrusive and/or where cross-joins have been recorded between features.

Quantification

Describe methods of quantification in an introductory section on methodology. State and reference the methods and rationale used for measuring and estimating vessel size, diameter, wall-thickness and volume.

Clearly state the total number (excluding fresh breaks) and weight of sherds and average sherd weight in the report, along with the number of recognised vessels and the method used to calculate vessel counts.

Use tables to present a proportional breakdown of the assemblage by key attributes and by site sub-division, phase and stratigraphic groupings. Presenting data in a standardised tabulated format enables direct comparison to be made between assemblages.

Discussion

The discussion should address those questions outlined in the assessment and stated in the introduction to the report.

Common themes for discussion include

- the technology of pottery making and the organisation of industries

- the range of sources for pottery

- modes of local, regional, national or international exchange or trade

- modes of acquisition

- the chronology of pottery use and disposal

- patterns of pottery distribution across the site

- ways of utilisation and consumption

- comparisons with other assemblages

- site formation processes and taphonomy

- the character of certain stratigraphic or structural components (eg site phases, areas of the site or individual features)

- the character of the site or what it represents (eg a dwelling, industrial zone, etc)

The discussion should place the assemblage in its wider local and regional context.

Illustrations

Illustrations should be produced at an appropriate scale and to an acceptable standard (see Green 1987; Hurman and Steiner 1997; Collett 2012).

Acknowledgements

The location of scientific specimens, pottery type series, records and the archive (paper and digital) should be clearly stated in the publication. The illustrator and photographer should be credited along with the names of individuals and organisations involved in scientific research.

Downloads and Resources

These groups have websites with pages that provide links to further, period-specific resources, including online access to out-of-print key texts, recording methodologies, research frameworks and online type series.

- [Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group](#) (PCRG)
- [Study Group for Roman Pottery](#) (SGRP)
- [Medieval and Later Pottery Research Group](#) (MLPRG)

Online type series

Regional

- [Gloucester pottery type series](#)
- [Kent: The Christopher St John Breen Roman & Medieval Pottery Archive](#)
- [Suffolk Medieval Pottery Series - fabric samples](#)
- [Worcestershire ceramics online database](#)

Supra-regional

- [Atlas of Roman Pottery](#)
- Medieval Pottery Research Group, 1998 *[A Guide to the Classification of Medieval Ceramic Forms,](#)* MPRG Occasional Paper 1
- [National Roman Pottery Reference Collection](#)
- [Samian research – names on terra sigillata](#)

Physical type series

For a list of physical type series see: https://medievalpottery.org.uk/ceramic-reference-collection-lists-from-mprg-standards/

Recording aids

Pottery record template

This Excel spreadsheet linked below provides example recording sheets for each of the levels of recording outlined in the [Recording](#) section – [Spot date (Appraisal/Assessment)](#); [Basic record](#); [Detailed record](#).

- [Download Pottery Record Template spreadsheet](#) (Excel .XLSX file; 27KB)

Each record can be edited to suit the needs of the pottery specialist, the project and the assemblage, and should not be considered a minimum or a maximum of fields to include. In all cases it is highly recommended that period-specific guidance be sought when deciding what elements of a pottery assemblage to record.

Other recording aids

[Rim chart/ radius chart](#) (PDF)

This recording aid is needed to measure both the vessel radius and the proportion of the rim represented by a sherd when collecting vessel equivalent statistics (from [Potsherd.net](#))

Both the PCRG guidelines (PCRG 1997) and *Pottery in Archaeology* (Orton and Hughes 2013) include multiple appendices that will likely be of use to pottery specialists working in all periods, including identification and recording methodologies of inclusions, firing conditions, fabric descriptions etc.

- PCRG 1997, *[The Study of Prehistoric Pottery: General policies and guidelines for analysis and publication](#)* (PDF). Occasional Papers Nos 1 and 2.

- Orton, C and Hughes, M, 2013 *Pottery in archaeology*, second edition, Cambridge University Press ([available online](#) via institutional access)

References and Further Reading

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- Perrin K, et al, 2014 [*A Standard and Guide to Best Practice for Archaeological Archiving in Europe*](#), EAC Guidelines 1.

- Perrin, R, 2011 *A Research Strategy and Updated Agenda for the Study of Roman Pottery in Britain*, Study Group for Roman Pottery Occasional Paper 1

- Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group, 2016 *Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group Research Framework: Agenda and Strategy*, PCRG Occasional Paper 7. Salisbury: Wessex Archaeology

- Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group, 2010 *The Study of Prehistoric Pottery. General Policies and Guidelines for Analysis and Publication*, PCRG Occasional Papers 1 and 2 (third edition). Salisbury: Wessex Archaeology

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- Vince, A, 2010 [*United Kingdom Thin Section Database*](#)

- Watkinson, D and Neal, R, 2001 *First Aid for Finds*. RESCUE

- Webster, G, 1976 *Romano-British coarse pottery: a student's guide*, CBA Research Report 6. London

- Whittle, A, Healy, F and Bayliss, A, 2011 *Gathering Time: Dating the Early Neolithic Enclosures of Southern Britain and Ireland*. Oxford: Oxbow Books (see pp 38-39 and fig 2.24 for information on selecting specimens for radiocarbon dating).

Online sources

- Taylor, J S and May, K, [The Archaeologist's Guide to Good Practice](#) (AG2GP)

- [CIfA Toolkits](#)

    o [Toolkit for Specialist Reporting](#)

    o [Toolkit for Recording Archaeological Materials](#)

    o [Toolkit for Selecting Archaeological Archives](#)

    o [Toolkit for Managing Digital Data (Dig Digital)](#)

Glossary

|	
Archaeological monitoring and recording/ Watching brief	The monitoring of development works by an archaeologist.
Archaeological project	Any programme of work that involves the collection and/or production of information about an archaeological site, assemblage or object in any environment, including in the field, under water, at a desk or in a laboratory. Examples of an archaeological project include: intrusive projects such as excavation, field evaluation, watching brief, surface recovery and the destructive analysis of objects; non-intrusive projects such as landscape or building survey, aerial survey, remote sensing; off-site research such as desk-based assessment and the recording of objects or object assemblages. The re-investigation of archives in curatorial care also constitutes an archaeological project (Perrin et al 2014).
Context or Contextual unit	A single stratigraphic or surveyed unit recorded separately in the field; eg an excavated deposit or feature, a grid square for surface collection.
Diagnostic	A pottery type or form that is characteristic of a particular time period (chronologically diagnostic), product (typologically diagnostic) or culturally defined area (culturally diagnostic).
Data management plan (DMP)	A plan for the management of digital data throughout the course of a project that includes procedures for data types, formats, standards, access, data storage, preservation and resourcing.
Fabric	The identifier given to a type of pottery that has been characterised by the substance it is made from, ie the clay and inclusions. Fabrics are usually denoted by codes, either as a unique number or as combinations of characters and numerals.
Fabric type series	A reference collection of specimens of every pottery fabric identified within a specific area, accompanied by a descriptive catalogue.
Form	The shape of a pottery vessel or component thereof.
MLPRG	The Medieval and Later Pottery Research Group – www.medievalpottery.org.uk.
PCRG	Prehistoric Ceramic Research Group – www.pcrg.org.uk.
Pottery	Vessels made of fired clay, complete or fragmented. Some fired clay objects, such as roof furniture (eg finials or louvres), may be studied by pottery specialists and in such instances the Toolkit

	may be applicable. Other ceramic objects, such as loom-weights, bricks and tiles, are excluded from the Toolkit because they require different analytical approaches and are studied by different specialists.
Pottery assemblage	All the pottery collected during an archaeological project.
Pottery specialist	An individual who is competent in, and specialises in, characterising, quantifying, analysing, interpreting and reporting on pottery assemblages. A pottery specialist will have developed expertise through the extensive study of pottery, and reporting in reputable, peer reviewed sources, with a demonstrable ability to work unsupervised. Membership of a pottery study group is a valuable way of acquiring and sharing knowledge, while competence can be demonstrated through accreditation by CIfA. Both are recommended.
Pottery type series (PTS)	A defined typology of ceramic types (fabrics and/or forms) that have been identified as being most common in a local or national setting.
Project brief	A document that sets out the scope, aims and rationale for an archaeological project, usually with the purpose of informing the development of a project design or written scheme of investigation.
Project design	The document that includes a description of the scope, aims, objectives, tasks, strategies and methods of a project, the personnel involved and the timetable. This document may be called something different depending on the jurisdiction of the work, eg written scheme of investigation (WSI), method statement, programme of works, etc.
Project executive	The person who instigates or commissions an archaeological project, often in either a planning role or through a funding agency, and who has a primary role in determining the aims and frame of reference.
Project manager	The person who manages the project and the project team.
Project team	The people who collectively work with the project manager throughout the course of the project, agreeing the project design and strategies for the completion of project tasks.
SGRP	Study Group for Roman Pottery – https://romanpotterystudy.org.uk/
Transfer of title	The means by which ownership of archaeological finds is passed onto another person or institution, usually a museum: applicable in England and Wales and centrally organised in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Type 1 Description	See Toolkit for Specialist Reporting
Type 2 Appraisal/ Assessment	See Toolkit for Specialist Reporting
Type 3 Analysis	See Toolkit for Specialist Reporting
Vessel class	A broad term used to characterise the overall form of a pot; eg bowl, jar, jug.
Vessel type	A more specific way of classifying the overall form of a pot; eg carinated bowl, globular jar, pear-shaped jug.
Ware group	A group of ware types that has been assigned a collective name, such as high medieval glazed sandy ware.
Ware type	A type of pottery that is defined by a fabric or group of fabrics; eg Black-burnished ware or post-medieval redware.
Waster	A pot rejected after failure during firing (eg by melting, exploding, fragmenting).
Waster dump	A dump of pottery wasted in the kiln. These can comprise very large numbers of sherds, especially in industrial period contexts, leading to revised fieldwork strategies (see Historic England 2015).

Acknowledgements
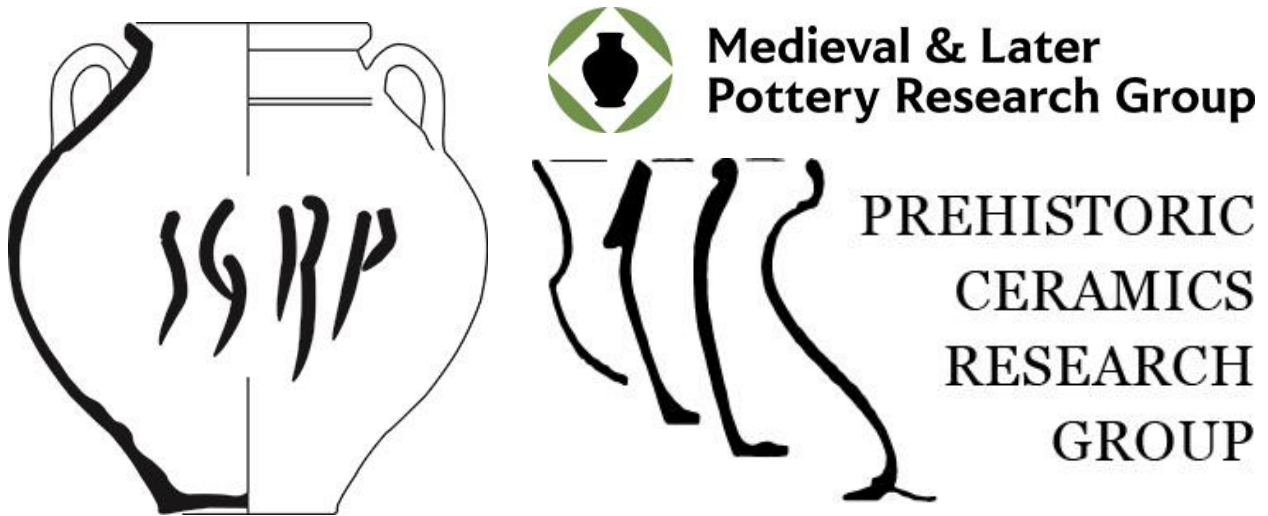
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