

2009

## Book Review: Ceramic Makers' Marks by Erica S. Gibson

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### Recommended Citation

Samford, Patricia (2009) "Book Review: Ceramic Makers' Marks by Erica S. Gibson," *Northeast Historical Archaeology*: Vol. 38 38, Article 7.

<https://doi.org/10.22191/neha/vol38/iss1/7> Available at: <http://orb.binghamton.edu/neha/vol38/iss1/7>

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## Book Reviews

Book Review Editor - Christa Beranek

**CERAMIC MAKERS' MARKS**, by Erica S. Gibson, 2010, Guides to Historical Artifacts, Left Coast Press, 147 pages, 253 black-and-white illustrations, indexes, \$89.00 (cloth), \$24.95 (paper).

Reviewed by Patricia Samford

Using archaeological collections recovered in California by the Anthropological Studies Center at Sonoma State University, author Erica Gibson has researched and compiled a ceramic identification guide. The volume includes 343 marks from 112 British, French, and German manufacturers, with the vast majority of the marks of British origin. Most of the marks identified in this guide date from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, an arrangement that would be expected given the provenience of the collections used in the creation of the volume.

Gibson states (p. 9-10) that marks "include well-known examples, variations of previously known marks, and formerly unidentified marks." She is as good as her word – this volume contains photographs of printed marks I have not seen depicted in other sources. Gibson makes it clear that this is not a comprehensive guide, rather one that focuses on marked archaeological pieces from the Anthropological Studies Center collections. As an example, Gibson illustrates 12 marks for the firm of William Adams and Sons, while Geoffrey Godden's *Encyclopaedia of British Pottery and Porcelain Marks* (1991) contains 24 marks from the same firm.

The volume's photographs are clear and crisp, making it much easier for archaeologists to identify fragmented partial marks from their own collections. Since many British marks from this period include a depiction of the royal coat of arms or other standardized motifs, the photographs in this volume show the slight variations in the marks much more clearly than the line drawings common in most other sources. These variations can be crucial in making a correct identification. While printed marks were reproduced as

photographs in the volume, impressed marks were handled less consistently. In only some cases were line drawings done of impressed marks, without explanation for the documentation disparity.

Several indexes in the back of the volume make it easy for users to identify fragmented marks. One index lists manufacturers' names and initials, another lists place names depicted in marks, and a final index includes common mark elements (royal coats of arms, Prince of Wales feathers, eagles, garters, etc.), as well as commonly-used words that could direct users to the appropriate manufacturer.

Each mark contains at least one and usually two or more references to other ceramic mark identification manuals. Godden (1991, 1999), Kowalsky and Kowalsky (1999), and Praetzellis, Rivers, and Schultz (1983) are relied upon most heavily. Each of these references uses a system of numbers or numbers and letters to identify specific marks. Instead of using these identifiers, Gibson cites only a page number for each reference. This technique made it difficult in some cases to determine which specific mark she was referencing. In other instances, the original source for mark beginning or end dates was not clear, and there was no explanation for how final date-range decisions were made when references provided disparate dates.

Marked pieces made by American manufacturers (with a few exceptions) were deliberately excluded and this exclusion is regrettable. Including these marks would have shown the growing importance of the American potteries and the increasing market for their wares throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The volume's introduction touched on the use of date ranges and context information from the archaeological assemblages from which the marked ceramics were recovered, but specific instances were not apparent in later text. Including these data would have been helpful to other archaeologists in refining dates for vessel-use spans for their own assemblages.

Because the volume is restricted to pieces from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries,

this focus limits its usefulness to some degree, particularly in geographic locations that were settled much earlier. The title seems misleading – *Ceramic Makers' Marks* implies a comprehensive guide; perhaps *Ceramic Makers' Marks from California Archaeological Sites* would have been a more representative title. This volume is part of the Left Coast Press Guide to Historical Artifacts series and makes a nice addition to (but not replacement for) the standard ceramic identification references that should comprise any archaeological library's collections.

## References

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Patricia Samford is the Director of the Maryland Archaeological Conservation Laboratory at Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum, St. Leonard, Maryland. Her research interests include African diaspora archaeology in the American South and 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century ceramics.

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**ETHNOGRAPHIES AND ARCHAEOLOGIES: ITERATIONS OF THE PAST**, edited by Lena Mortensen and Julie Hollowell, 2009, *Cultural Heritage Studies Series*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 288 pages, 9 illustrations, \$69.95 (cloth).

Reviewed by Christina J. Hodge

Recent scholarship in archaeology (and museum studies) is clear: for some of us, a zeitgeist has gathered. Critical reflexivity is increasingly framed not as an admirable idea but as a fundamental of good practice. For archaeologists, the discussion is about not only ethics and engagement, but also the ability to achieve demonstrable worth in a competitive, capitalistic, postmodern world. Lena Mortensen and Julie Hollowell's excellent volume joins other edited collections and journal volumes exploring how we archaeologists do—and might do—public archaeologies, community collaboration, civic engagement, and applied anthropology. Most of these compilations overtly espouse ethnographic analysis and social intervention; what some label an “ethnographic turn.” The novelty of Mortenson and Hollowell's perspective in *Ethnographies and Archaeologies* is articulated in its Introduction: contributors knowingly deploy ethnography to “de-center or reposition the role of archaeologists and archaeological practice in the discussion of constructing the past” (p. 7). Contributing authors provide globally diverse perspectives, and they are mostly well known in this genre of reflexive study. Here, these scholars do *not* do ethnographies of archaeology or archaeologists; rather, they parse the ways *non*-archaeologists articulate with specific archaeological worlds. Contributors recognize that populations included in, and absented from, archaeology encompass a range of positions besides archaeologists and singular stakeholder communities. This is an edited volume for practicing archaeologists, relevant to anthropologists and heritage practitioners, about how others' “iterations” of the past enliven and constrain our present archaeologies.

Mortenson and Hollowell's Introduction provides a lucid review of reflexivity in archaeology, which they historicize within