

THE CHRONOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK by Keith Wade

The chronological framework used to analyse the archaeological evidence from the Ipswich excavations 1974-1990 is based on:

1. The stratigraphic sequences
2. The associated cultural material

As is normal practice, the stratigraphy provides the relative chronology and the associated cultural material allows absolute dates. All the normal limitations apply to this approach.

Stratigraphy

Most of the Ipswich sites (apart from the waterfront sequences) have little or no vertical stratigraphy and horizontal stratigraphy is of no use for isolated features. For the latter, only the associated material can provide a date.

The life of structures, when in a stratigraphic sequence, is difficult to define and even more so for isolated structures. All the Anglo-Saxon structures were constructed in timber with earth-fast posts. The life of a timber, before decay through rotting requires its replacement, can vary according to a number of factors, such as whether it is hard wood or soft wood, and whether it has been treated to prolong life. Oak, which is commonly used, has a longer life than pine and charring or treatment with a preservative such as pine tar could extend life for many years. Structures can also be destroyed long before their natural end of life either accidentally, usually by fire, or deliberately demolished as part of a redevelopment scheme.

Structures also vary in their quality of construction. The most impressive of the Ipswich 'cellared' buildings employ substantial posts comparable to those used in the best 16th century timber-framed buildings which are still standing.

When continuous occupation can be inferred, it is reasonable to divide the period of occupation by the phases of buildings to determine likely life-span and this implies that a life of 50-60 years is possible for the most substantial 10th-11th century Ipswich 'cellared' buildings. Undoubtedly this would have required vigilant maintenance including some replacement of rotten posts.

Associated Cultural Material

The use of cultural material for dating also has its well-rehearsed limitations:

1. Absolute Dates
 - Coins while providing absolute dates can be in circulation for some time prior to burial and often will be residual in later contexts. Over 50% of the Ipswich Anglo-Saxon coins were residual in later contexts.
 - C14 Dates. Some of the Ipswich dates are clearly wildly inaccurate.
 - Dendrochronology dates: doesn't usually work here.

2. Date Ranges

The most useful date-range indicator is pottery because it is common and distinctive and the date ranges of production/circulation have been reasonably well defined. However, the pottery phases need to be used with caution because:

a)residuality is common . The later the context on a multi-period site, then the more likely it is that it will contain finds which are residual from earlier periods. The extent of this problem can be clearly seen in the 10th-11th century assemblages that all contain from 10-40% of residual Ipswich ware.

- It is clear that the primary reason for the digging of pits was for the extraction of gravel and not for rubbish disposal. Pits (and old building 'cellars') were then backfilled with whatever was available.
- Rubbish from middens which would be a mixture of current and old waste. The matching of joining sherds from distinctive single pots demonstrates the widespread dispersal of rubbish across a site and even from one side of a road to another (Foundation Street). This demonstrable mixing of current and earlier material renders detailed analysis, to determine typological development of forms, for example, a hazardous exercise, which increases with time on a multi-period site.
- Soil scraped up from the adjacent ground surface or from the unwanted 'topsoil' element removed in the upper sections of pit digging.

b) The pottery phases rely on the presence of particular fabrics which could be absent by chance or because they occur in small proportions which might rule out their presence in small assemblages.

In spite of these cautions, the assemblages can still be used to provide a *terminus post quem* date on the basis of the latest ceramic wares.

3. Care must also be taken about how the dates are used in relation to different contexts:

a) Surface-laid structures

The postholes of a building are likely to contain pottery which was by chance contained in the soil used to backfill the hole after a post was inserted i.e. the date is a *terminus post quem* for the life of the building.

In addition, some postholes may have been replaced during the life of the building allowing contemporary pottery in to some of the postholes.

b) Ditches

Ditch fills may also be complex. Ditches would normally be kept clean during their life and then filled quickly with rubbish on abandonment. Some of this material could be rubbish available at the time i.e. the pottery date is a *terminus ante quem* for the use of the ditch or may be material scraped up from the area, which could be contemporary with the use of the ditch or earlier. There may, however, be primary fills with cultural material dating to its first use. This can't be assumed, however, as material in primary fills can be derived from erosion of adjoining banks which derives from features dug through in the excavation of the ditch (and therefore earlier than the ditch digging).

c) Pits

Most pits were not dug primarily for rubbish disposal but were for the extraction of gravel or clay or for cess disposal. Cultural material was placed in them on their abandonment, which like ditches could be rubbish contemporary with the abandonment or material scraped up from the area (or middens) which could be contemporary with its use, or earlier, or a combination of both sources. The cellars of cellared buildings are similar.

Another issue with large/deep features is subsidence following backfill which may contain material later than the initial back-fill and these may not have been isolated during excavation.

d) Wells contain two different assemblages: the backfill around the inserted well linings, which would be a contemporary with the construction or earlier in date and a central

shaft filled on abandonment with rubbish contemporary and/or earlier than the abandonment date.

The Ipswich Chronology

Pottery periods

Abbrev	Period	Date Range	Diagnostic ceramic assemblage
PREH	Prehistoric		
ROM	Roman		
EAS	Early Anglo-Saxon	450-600 AD	
EMS	Early Middle Saxon	600-700 AD	Handmade without Ipswich Ware
MS	Middle Saxon	700-850/880 AD	Ipswich Ware/Continental imports
ELS	Early Late Saxon	850/880-900 AD	Thetford ware (+decreasing Ipswich Ware)
MLS	Middle Late Saxon	900-1000 AD	Thetford+St Neot's Ware
EMED	Early Medieval	1000-1150 AD	Early Medieval Ware
LMED	Medieval	1150-1450 AD	Medieval coarse+glazed wares
LMT	Late Medieval Transitional	1450-1600 AD	
PMED	Post Medieval	1600-1900	
MOD	Modern	1900 onwards	

The period date ranges correspond to the published evidence for the pottery fabric date ranges. Although they will not change relative to each other, as the relative sequence is evidenced by thousands of stratigraphic records, the start and end dates could well change as more research is completed. Surprisingly, despite 60 years research by ceramic specialists, the date ranges of the main Anglo-Saxon fabrics have remained more or less the same as those originally proposed by John Hurst in the 1950s (Hurst 1955, 1956, 1957). This doesn't mean that they are necessarily right but reflects the difficulty in establishing more accurate dates for the start and end of the production sites. The date range of Ipswich Ware and the start date for Ipswich Thetford is particularly open to question.

The pottery periods are quite broad and greater precision within periods, based on cultural material, has also proved difficult. Ceramic specialist have defined typologies of rim forms for Ipswich Ware and Thetford ware and some 'early' and 'late' forms have been suggested but these should be used with caution (see Anderson 1995, Dallas 1984, 1993, Lentowicz 2009).

Consequently, phases within these ceramic periods are based almost solely on stratigraphic evidence.

Notes on the Ipswich Pottery Periods

a) Early Middle Saxon (EMS)

This period relates to the first Anglo-Saxon occupation, associated with handmade pottery and continental imports conventionally dated to the late 6th and 7th century. The best Ipswich groups come from the Greyfriars Road site. Chaff-tempered pottery is common in the south of England from the 5th-7th centuries and forms 100% of local wares in the 7th century. North of the Thames it rarely forms more than 15% of assemblages in the 7th century and this is true of Suffolk (Hamerow and Vince 1994 and Wade 2009), emphasising how unusual the Ipswich assemblage is with chaff-tempered wares often forming 100% of

the local pottery. The dating of this period is problematic. If the occupation relates to the cemetery excavated immediately to the north on the Buttermarket site, it would have a similar date range of c.610/640-690 AD (Scull 2009). If the new start date for Ipswich Ware is c.720, this could leave a gap of 30 years between the two which seems unlikely. Three explanations are possible:

- The cemetery, which is much larger than the area excavated at the Buttermarket, continues until 720, along with the associated settlement, and its handmade pottery or
- The occupation associated with handmade wares dates to the period c.690-c.720 i.e. for some 30 years prior to the start of Ipswich Ware production (and the founding of the 'new town' north of the original nucleus of settlement close to the river crossing). This would leave us with no settlement associated with the Buttermarket cemetery (and potentially no cemetery associated with this pre Ipswich Ware occupation).
- It is possible that Ipswich Ware production started as early as 690 but was not exported in significant quantity until the 720s. The argument against this, and which persuaded Blinkhorn to opt for c.720, is the absence of any primary series *sceattas* associated with Ipswich Ware in Ipswich (or anywhere else). It might also be expected that primary *sceattas* would be associated with the pre Ipswich Ware phase in Ipswich if it dates 690-720. This would seem to favour the option of Ipswich Ware starting c.690 being given serious consideration.

It is of interest that this new dating for Ipswich Ware has also caused similar interpretation problems in the *wic* at London, where an almost identical sequence of activity has been excavated (Cowie et al 2012). The proposed sequence here is;

- c.640-c.690: a cemetery, like that at Ipswich Buttermarket, and with no associated settlement (as yet);
- c.690-c.730: settlement associated with handmade wares (as at Ipswich) and no associated cemetery but with primary *sceattas*;
- c.730-c/850: major *wic* settlement of 60 ha. Associated with Ipswich Ware.

It is clear, however, that this current model for London sequence isn't entirely satisfactory as London is described as a 'port where ships come to land' in a charter of 672x674 and a waterfront revetment has been dated to 679 (Cowie and Blackmore 2012, 14).

A similar sequence has also been established at the other contemporary *wic* site at Southampton.

b) Middle Saxon (MS)

Hurst (1959) proposed a start date of c.650 for Ipswich Ware. Blinkhorn (2012, 3-8) has proposed that it doesn't start until the 720s. This is mainly based on the lack of associated primary or intermediate *sceattas* (690-720) either in Ipswich or elsewhere. However, there is pre Ipswich Ware occupation in Ipswich with no primary *sceattas* associated, which could allow the possibility of production in Ipswich before the 720s to be entertained with restricted export in the early years. However, the lack of Ipswich ware in the Buttermarket graves would argue for a start date no earlier than c.690 (3 graves did produce Ipswich Ware sherds but they could easily be intrusive). There is no certain evidence as yet for the end date of Ipswich Ware but it is likely to be later than the date of c.850, as Hurst originally proposed.

c) Early Late Saxon (ELS)

This is characterised by assemblages with a mixture of Ipswich Ware and Thetford Ware or Thetford Ware only. It assumes that Thetford Ware production starts before that of St

Neot's Ware, which was c.900 (Blinkhorn 2013, 162-163). It is likely therefore that St Neot's ware would only have been imported to Ipswich in small quantities in the first decade or two after 900.

It could be argued that the major cultural break at the end of the MS period is more likely to coincide with the Danish occupation which would put the start date of the ELS period at c.870 and the change from Ipswich to Thetford ware production after that date. This is supported by the coin evidence in that the only coins associated are clearly associated with the Scandinavian occupation.

Only six coins (other than residual sceattas) were associated with ELS contexts

31040317 (layer): Charles the Bald dernier (864-900/910)

31040362 (layer): Viking copy of Alfred penny (c.880-899)

31040385 (layer): Edmund memorial penny (895-920)

31042021 (pit): Viking copy of Alfred halfpenny (c.880-899)

31043291 (pit): Viking copy of Alfred penny (c.880-899)

48010258 (pit): Charles the Bald dernier (864-900/910)

The coins imply a start date after the Danish settlement from 880. There was a further Viking copy of an Alfred penny in an MLS context (IAS31040081) and a Charles the Bald dernier in an EMED context (IAS52030227).

Admittedly, the excavations did not produce many ninth century coins and, unfortunately, none of the eight, coins, lost prior to 880 were associated with either MS or ELS contexts:

Ceolwulf penny. c.821-3 (IAS 48010894, EMED)

Beornwulf penny, c.825-40 (IAS 550200001, u/s)

Aethelheard penny, c.800-60 (IAS48011583, MLS)

Canterbury penny, c.805-60 (IAS 52030056, EMED)

Aethelstan penny, c. 825-69 (IAS 31041153, LMED)

Aethelweard penny, c.845-55 (IAS 55020001, u/s)

Edmund penny, c.855-69 (IAS 52040001, u/s)

Edmund penny, c.855-69 (IAS 31040001). u/s)

The only other, pre 880, ninth century coin was a Coenwulf penny, c.805-810, from the MS pit IAS08020007.

The percentage of Ipswich Ware in these assemblages indicates a combination of two processes that cannot be separated:

- the overlap period of Ipswich Ware and Thetford Ware production;
- the higher availability of rubbish with Ipswich ware in it, which declines through time as more old rubbish becomes buried in features reducing the chance of its re-deposition.

This is probably the period to be treated with the most caution when stratigraphic evidence is lacking for isolated features and where

- sherd numbers are low. As St Neots Ware rarely forms more than 2-10% of the MLS assemblages in the town, the chances of a feature actually being of Middle Late Saxon date increases as the assemblage size decreases.
- the site lies outside the main Middle Saxon occupation area and there was therefore little chance of Ipswich ware as a high residual percentage, such as Elm Street (IAS3902) and Franciscan Way (IAS5003).

d) Middle Late Saxon (MLS)

Characterised by the presence of St Neot's Ware with Thetford Ware but no later wares.

e) Early Medieval (EMED)

This is characterised by the presence of Early Medieval Wares with Thetford Ware. The precise start date for EMW is still uncertain but traditionally placed c.1000 (Hurst 1976, 342-343). This would seem to be confirmed in Norwich (Lentowicz 2009, 151) and there is no evidence from Ipswich to give cause to question it. The presence of imported wares, such as Rhenish Greywares and Andenne glazed wares, only confirm its use in the late 11th and 12th centuries.

Radiocarbon Dates

Site	Context	Sample	Ref	Date
IAS3902	0465	Human bone from late Saxon ditch	HAR-2781	710+/-90*
IAS5502	0280	Timber from barrel well lining	HAR-2764	830+/-70
IAS5502	0524	Human bone from pit	HAR-2778	940+/-80
IAS4302	0039	Timber from hollowed-out tree trunk well lining	HAR-2763	720+/-70
IAS3410	0031	Charcoal from pit with coin of Alfred (885-915)	HAR-4627	880+/-60
IAS3104	2476	Grain from EMED building 2022		790+/-50
	2388	Bread roll from EMED building 2022		800+/-50
	2604	Charcoal from EMED building 2002		740+/-50
IAS4601	0741	Grain from EMED building 677		710+/-50
	0760	Grain from EMED building 677		780+/-50

Notes:

The dates from 3104 and 4601 are clearly ALL wildly inaccurate for some reason. The samples all come from certain 11th century contexts i.e. all are 300 years earlier than they should be. No explanation has been forthcoming but with all 5 samples similarly affected, an explanation should be possible.

Dendrochronology Dates

IAS5203	0630	Tree trunk well lining		698+
	0697	Stave from barrel well lining		754+
IAS5701	0026	Barrel stave from well		712+
	0053	Barrel stave from well		Undated

The Coins

193 coins were recovered from the 1974-1990 excavations (Archibald). They break down as follows;

- 150 Anglo-Saxon (2 tremisses, 87 sceattas, 57 pennies/halfpennies, and 4 foreign late Saxon.
- 27 Medieval
- 16 Post medieval

The Anglo-Saxon Coins

Both the tremisses came from the Buttermarket cemetery (Archibald 2009)

70% the sceattas were residual, in later contexts, leaving 30% in Middle Saxon contexts.

53% of the late Saxon coins were residual, leaving 47% in late Saxon contexts.

The *in situ* coins provide a valuable confirmation of the broad date ranges assigned to periods but only a few coins proved critical in dating sequences.

The Historical Framework

Although the documentary evidence for Anglo-Saxon Ipswich is scanty, the following key events could be represented in the archaeological record.

879: the 'Danish' army settled East Anglia under King Guthrum (baptized Aethelstan in 878).

885: King Alfred's fleet in action against the Danes in the Stour mouth.

920: East Anglia submits to King Edward of the West Saxons

991: Ipswich ravaged by the Danes

993: Viking attack on Ipswich

1010: The Danes under Thurkill landed at Ipswich (the Suffolk levies defeated near Ringmere).

1016: Cnut's forces enter the Orwell. East Anglia governed by Thurkill on behalf of Cnut.

1065: Ipswich had 538 burgesses with 40 acres.

1066: William of Normandy ruler of England

1069: Sweyn of Denmark sails up the Orwell and is defeated by Roger Bigod, Robert Malet and Ralph Wader near Ipswich

1086: Domesday Book: Ipswich had 110 burgesses, the remaining burgages lie waste.

1153: Siege of Ipswich castle by King Stephen.

1176: Bigod's castle of Ipswich destroyed.

1203: The 'magna fossata' of Ipswich constructed.

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