

# **Cottam A Excavations in 1996 (COT96E)**

## **The Pottery**

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### **Introduction**

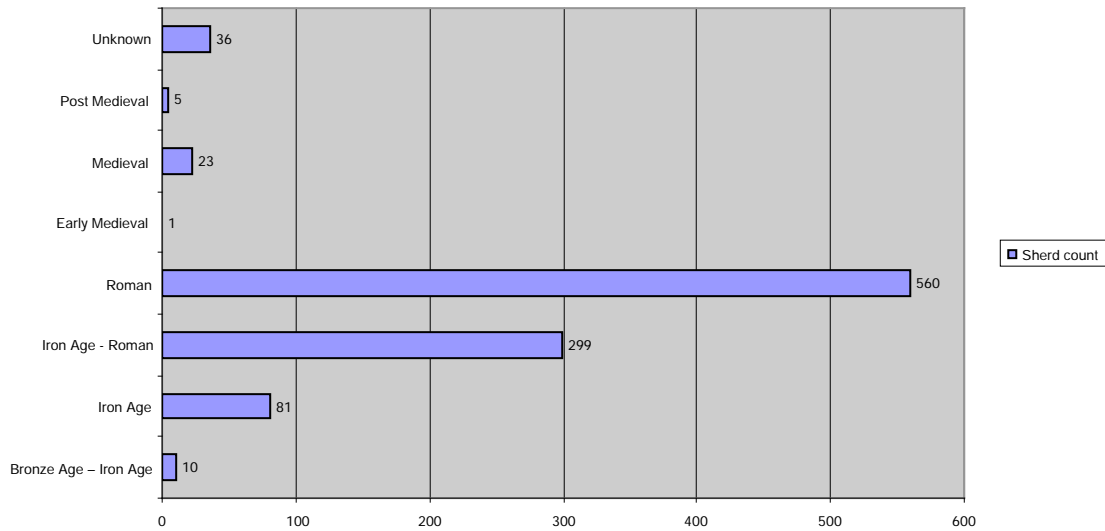
In 1996 a 40m x 50m trench was opened in the 'Stockyard Field' adjacent and 0.5 km to the south of Cottam Grange Farm. The trench was located following metal detectorist activity, fieldwalking (COT94F) and geophysical survey (Richards 1997).

The site finds register contains over 900 references to ceramic material; mostly pottery but including small amounts of tile and daub. A recent re-examination of the physical archive failed to locate the objects associated with 50 of the entries in the finds register that referenced ceramic material. Of the remaining material it should be noted that there is not a direct one to one correlation between a finds reference and an object in that in a significant number of cases the references are to multiple objects (sherds in the case of pottery). This is noted in the database constructed during the recent re-examination of the ceramic material.

### **Assemblage**

1015 objects were examined represented by 851 finds references. The material was overwhelmingly of Roman or later Iron Age in date (940 sherds = 92.6% of the total assemblage) although a small number of earlier prehistoric and post-Roman sherds were also present. It should be noted that the production of some pottery fabrics span more than one archaeological period. For example, Calcite Gritted wares in Yorkshire are acknowledged as being produced in the periods that precede and probably follow the Roman period (posited by, for example, Whitwell, 1989 and cogently argued by Whyman, 2001). Within these wares certain rim sherds can be assigned to distinct periods. Generally vessel rims become more outturned over time. Similarly the cross section or thickness of a sherd decreases. Thus body sherds can be difficult to assign to a specific period especially where significant numbers of rim sherds datable to the different periods are present.

### Assemblage overview



## Fabrics

### *Bronze Age or earlier Iron Age:*

A small number of sherds (10) were assigned to this group. They are of a rough, softish, hand thrown fabric and contain large mineral grits and on occasion pieces of shell. These thick walled sherds have orange to grey buff surfaces.

### *Later Iron Age:*

A larger group of sherds (81) were assigned to the later Iron Age. These were again in a soft, roughish, hand thrown fabric with buff to grey-buff surfaces. Inclusions included calcite grits and characteristic voids where these have leached out. They were thinner walled than earlier material and had undeveloped rims compared to later forms. This material was considered similar enough to fit in to the wider spectrum of Iron Age fabrics defined in the northeast of England (for example, see Buckland et al, 1990: Sumpter, 1990).

### *Later Iron Age or Roman:*

A significant group of sherds (299) that are clearly within the tradition of calcite gritted wares (see below) could not be assigned to either the Iron Age or the Roman period because of insufficient diagnostic features.

### *Roman:*

Roman sherds (560) dominated the assemblage and included

Calcite gritted wares: 113 sherds in this fabric were assigned to the Roman period. The sherds feel rough to the touch with a hackly fracture but were consistently harder and reduced during firing tending towards dark grey or even black. Like earlier material the main inclusions are calcite grits up to 5 mm in size or at least the characteristic voids left by the leaching out of this material. The fabric also contains fine quartzite sand which may have already been present or added to the clay before firing. The distribution of calcite gritted wares increased dramatically in the mid third century during the Roman period largely in the form of hand-thrown Knapton type cooking pots or jars which have a pronounced out-turned rim (also at Norton, see Hayes and Whitley 1950, 30-31; fig. 11). Subsequently in the later fourth century Huntcliffe type jars become prominent in the form of a wheel-turned vessel with a very distinctive hooked rim and an internal grooved lid seating (Tomber & Dore, 1998, 201). One Huntcliffe and five possible Knapton type rim sherds were identified within the assemblage.

East Yorkshire Grey wares: A total of 355 sherds were placed in this group. A hard, slightly abrasive, wheel-thrown fabric that generally has a light to medium grey core and surfaces with the latter sometimes decorated with burnished lines. The clay contains sand which includes quartz (0.1-0.2mm) and grits such as iron ore. It has an expanded production from the mid 3rd century with kiln sites including Norton and Holme-on-Spalding Moor (Corder, 1934; 1950, 27; Hayes, 1988).

Crambeck Grey or Reduced ware: Represented by 36 sherds they have a hard, slightly abrasive, wheel-thrown fabric that has slipped medium grey surfaces and a very light grey core. The clay contains sand which includes quartz (0.1-0.2mm) and grits such as iron ore. Production appears to begin very late within the 3rd century and continues into the 5th (Corder, 1989; Evans, 1989, 55; Tomber & Dore, 1998)

Samian: A total of 30 sherds were identified. A smooth, hard-fired, oxidized tableware with a distinctive glossy orange-red slip which was mass-produced on the Continent during the Roman period and imported in large quantities (eg Johns, 1971, 24-5; Swan, 1988, 12-3). Apart from a pedestal base the sherds were generally small to minute and difficult to assign to distinct Samian industries.

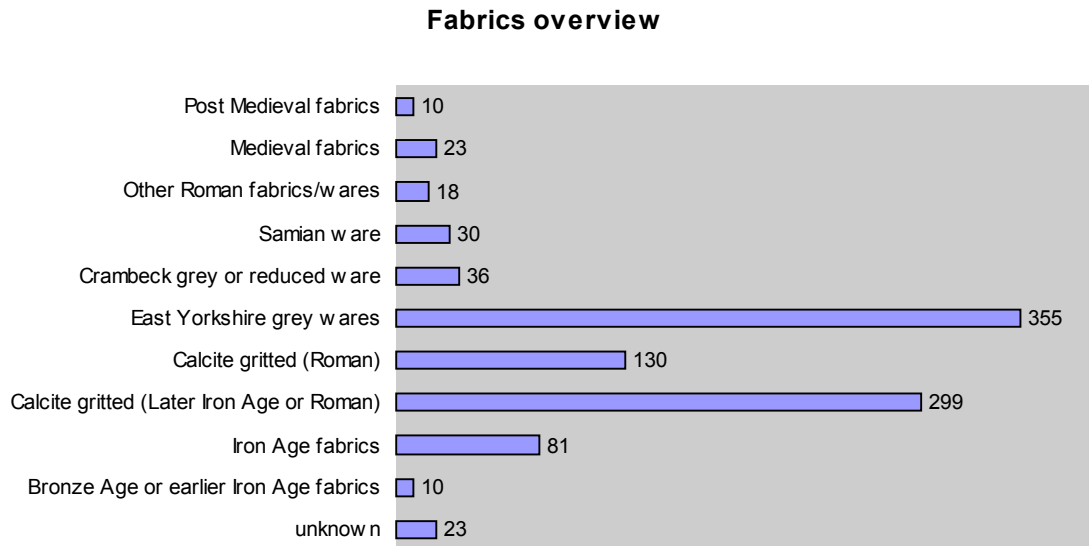
Other Roman fabrics: A number of other fabrics were tentatively identified as present in very small quantities. These included Black Burnished ware (1), Eboracum wares (5), Pink grog-tempered Ware (1), Crambeck parchment ware (1), Swanpool type wares (8) and fine wares such as a Colour coated ware (1) and Eggshell ware (1) (see Tomber & Dore 1998)

Medieval

A total of 20 sherds were assignable to the Medieval period including York glazed wares and Sandy ware (Jennings, 1992; McCarthy & Brooks, 1988).

## Post Medieval

Ten sherds were clearly in Post Medieval fabrics



## Contexts

All contexts containing pottery contained Roman fabrics including contexts tentatively assigned to the Iron Age in the unpublished 'Archive report' of the excavation (Richards, 1997). The significant amount of Iron Age pottery present needs explanation. It is possible that earlier Iron Age features have been significantly disturbed by later activity. It was noted that over 40% of the sherds examined were badly abraded which could be indicative of long term disturbance.

Apart from clearance layers (contexts) a small number of medieval sherds were noted in the uppermost fills of several features (contexts 5001, 5001B, 5009, 5010, 5023 and 5031). These may represent further disturbance in the Medieval period.

## Comment

The pottery assemblage would suggest that activity at the Cottam A site starts in the Iron Age although no features could be positively assigned to this period possibly because of subsequent disturbance. The assemblage contains few late Roman sherds (Huntcliffe, Crambeck, etc which were identified at the near by Cottam B site – Austin, 1999) which suggests domestic activity had largely ceased at some time in the earlier part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Subsequently deposits appear to have suffered heavy, possibly episodic, disturbance possibly by livestock (the heavy abrasion). Features may have been a source of water in certain conditions.

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