

Spot-dating and initial assessment of some handmade pottery from Heslington East

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Introduction: background

A total of 707 sherds of handmade pottery, weighing 15258 grams and having an average sherd weight (ASW) of 21.6 grams, was submitted for examination. In addition, there were 3 sherds of possible fired clay (32 grams) and a single possible non-ceramic item (5 grams).

The material comes from archaeological excavations at Heslington East undertaken by both the University of York (UOY, site codes HE08-HE11) and On-Site Archaeology (OSA, site code OSA10EV19), in the following proportions:

	Sherds	Weight (grams)	ASW
UOY	431	7931	18.4
OSA	276	7327	26.5

The pottery was identified as handmade material by Ruth Leary during her work on the Roman pottery from the site. Anglian pottery was subsequently extracted by Dr Ailsa Mainman, and it is the remaining material which forms the subject of this initial study. It was expected, on stratigraphic and other grounds, that the pottery would prove to be principally of Iron Age date and this is, in fact, the conclusion reached in the present report (see further, below); there is, however, almost no sign of the Bronze Age material which, it was suggested, might also be present, given the fact of other Bronze Age artefacts from the site.

Scope and methodology of the assessment

The study, undertaken over three days in June 2012, was intended to:

1. Provide an initial description of the varieties of handmade pottery present
2. Posit the likely date and cultural affinities of the type(s) of pottery

To these ends, the pottery was first quantified, by the two measures of sherd count and sherd weight, by fabric type within archaeological context. The resulting data was then entered onto an Access database, which is supplied as an integral part of this report and which should be consulted on matters of detail where appropriate.

Structure of the database

Each record in the database relates to a given number and weight of sherds of one fabric type from one location, the latter identified by site code and context number. Context

numbers, equipped with the minimum necessary number of leading zeros, are four-figure if UOY and five-figure if OSA.

Fabric types and the database codes employed are explained in the next section.

In addition to the identifiers mentioned above, each record contains the following columns:

Form (FORMS)

Allows individual vessels to be categorized in terms of their form type, using the following codes:

J	Jar
J(ER)	Everted rim jar
J(UR)	Upright rim jar
J/B	Jar/bowl
BAR	Barrel jar
BAR(LS)	Lid-seated barrel jar

These codes are normally employed only when rim or other sufficiently diagnostic sherds are present.

Form parallels (FORM //s)

Published parallels for individual vessels are cited in abbreviated form. At this stage, only a limited number of relevant sources was consulted. These are given below, with the codes employed and the relevant bibliographical reference:

CB	Creyke Beck, Cottingham	Didsbury forthcoming
CH	Various sites	Challis and Harding 1975
HAWL	Hawling Rd, Market Weighton	Evans with Creighton 1999
PIP	Various sites	Rigby 2004
RUDV	Rudston Villa	Rigby 1980
TT	Thorpe Thewles	Swain 1987
WPNM	Wharram Percy North Manor	Didsbury 2004

Cited material is identified by published vessel number, except in the case of Challis and Harding sites where figure and vessel number are both used, in the form "46/1", for example, and Hawling Road, where the original fabric/form codes are employed, *e.g.* "G32-J02".

Period code (PER)

The period to which the material is assigned, essentially a broad spot-dating column. The following codes are employed:

LBA/EIA	Late Bronze Age or early Iron Age
IA	Iron Age
RB	Romano-British
IA/RB	Iron Age or Romano-British
LIA/ERB	Late Iron Age or early Romano-British
EM	early medieval
MED	medieval

Provisional context date (PCD)

This is taken from the context index spreadsheets supplied by UOY and OSA. It allows easy comparison with the date of the material recorded in the previous column.

Remarks (REMARKS)

A free-text field allowing detailed fabric and form description, observations on cited parallels etc. The presence of sooting and residues is noted in this field.

Fabric terminology

Handmade fabrics in the indigenous Iron Age potting tradition have been given alphanumeric codes according to the main type of temper employed, as follows:

H	unrecognised tempering/no significant tempering
H1	with calcareous tempering
H2	with non-soluble stone tempering
H3	with mixed or other tempering
H4	vesicular, normally leached H1

The H2 category may be modified by the addition of a lower case letter specifying the principal tempering agent in more detail:

f = flint; grog = grog; ign = crushed igneous erratics; q = quartz; x = uncertain

An upper case “F” may also be added, denoting that the material may be regarded as a “fineware”. This designation is to some extent subjective, though it usually presupposes at least a burnished or well-smoothed external surface, usually, in these assemblages, black.

The code W has been used for a small amount of wheel-thrown material, and the codes RCG and RSHEL for Romano-British calcite-gritted and shell-tempered material, respectively. FC denotes fired clay, and NONCER non-ceramic material.

A basic fabric dichotomy between calcareously tempered and stone-tempered wares is characteristic of East Yorkshire assemblages throughout most of the first millennium BC (Rigby 1986, 145-146, discussion of ‘CTW’ and ‘ETW’). Although there is some evidence of centralized pottery production in the Vale of Pickering during part of the period, the kind of tempering employed is essentially condition by site location in relation to surface geology (Rigby 2004, 29). As common sense would suggest, sites situated on the till tend to produce stone-tempered wares, making use of the local glacial erratics, while sites on the Wolds make use of calcite and chalk tempering. The present site assemblage consists almost entirely of stone-tempered wares, some of them apparently derived from sandstones.

The broad generic nature of the fabric sub-divisions adopted is well-suited to initial assessment work, especially in light of the limited time available and the fact that the different fabric categories are essentially devoid of chronological significance. It does not preclude, of course, more precise characterization of fabrics at a further stage of research, to whatever extent thought necessary.

Within the H2 category, temper consists principally of free quartz grains, sandstones and basic igneous rock. Inclusion sizes vary considerably, from sand grade to c.10mm, but it is probably accurate to state that the majority of inclusions in H2q falls in the range 1-3 mm. It may be noted that the H2 fabrics are uniformly hard-fired, in this respect being comparable to material which is known to have been present in the region since at least the 4th century BC (Manby 1996, 35-36).

A fabric profile of the handmade material is presented in Table 1, below:

Table 1. Distribution of fabric types within the handmade material

Fabric	sherds	wt (grams)
H	15	27
H?	1	68
H1	175	3466
H2fl	1	7
H2grog?	3	63
H2ign	5	74
H2ign?	2	14
H2q	297	7116
H2q?	7	51
H2qF	62	2139

H2x	85	1417
H2x?	7	119
H3	1	10
H4	36	511
H4?	1	12

Findings

Before turning to a consideration of the Iron Age pottery, it will be convenient to mention a small amount of material which may be of other periods.

- *Bronze Age*

As noted above, there appears to be no Bronze Age or earlier material in the submitted assemblage. In order to check this conclusion, a large and fully representative cross-section of the fabric and form types was shown to T. G. Manby, who could find no indication of pre-Iron Age pottery. A single fragment of pottery with large flint temper, from OSA Trench 8, context 08001, does, however, have the potential to be of Late Bronze or Early Iron Age date.

- *Roman.*

A wheel-thrown jar shoulder from UOY 0733 is best characterized as Roman shell-tempered ware. It may well be from a third- or earlier fourth-century Dalesware jar. The provisional context date is late fourth-century/AD 360+

Rim and body sherds of a jar from UOY may also *possibly* be Roman. The rim is apparently handmade but the vessel in general, despite its irregularity, might be more at home among the “proto-Huntcliff” jars in the lower and middle Rudston Villa well deposits than in the Iron Age. There is no provisional date for the context.

- *Early Medieval and Medieval*

Small amounts of quartz-tempered material (H2q and Wq), the general appearance of which suggests they could be Early Medieval rather than Iron Age, come from UOY contexts 0096, 0444 and 0790. Context 0444 had a provisional date in the third or fourth century AD. Context 0096 also contained a putative Medieval sherd. Attribution of all this material should perhaps be re-examined at the final analysis stage.

- *Iron Age*

Having, after consultation with other period specialists, excluded the Bronze Age and Anglian periods from consideration, literature search for form parallels was concentrated exclusively on the regional Iron Age, specifically the Later Iron Age, since there was no

sign of the angularity, decorative techniques and softer fabric types which might have been expected at various periods before, say, the fourth century BC.

It is beyond the scope of the present brief assessment to consider individual context assemblages in any detail. The vast majority of the handmade material is, in any case, residual or redeposited within its context. It is appropriate, however, to consider such dating evidence as may be suggested by certain of the recurring vessel forms and thereby to judge more closely the period or periods of site activity within the Iron Age which may have contributed to the de-stratified assemblages.

As noted above, the material was commonly well-fired, well-potted and tempered with relatively fine material in the 1-3mm range. A small number of coarser vessels, in terms of temper size, were present, but there was nothing to indicate that any of these might not be contemporary with the finer products. Two of these were found in fills 2067 and 2068 of cut 2110, a Romano-British ditch (OSA Trench 2). The vessel from 2068, of which substantial portions are extant, finds a close parallel in a large wide-mouthed jar or bowl from South Cave (Challis and Harding 1975, fig. 35, no. 9). The ditch deposit from which the South Cave parallel comes is discussed by the aforementioned authors (*op. cit.*, 95) and attributed to a late stage within their regional La Tène III of the first centuries BC and AD. It may be noted that most of the vessel parallels cited as “CH” in the database are also credited to this period.

Several of the vessel forms also find close parallels in the later Iron Age and early Romano-British assemblages from Hawling Road, Market Weighton (Evans with Creighton 1999). Table 2 is not exhaustive of these parallels but shows the most commonly recurring forms, the Heslington contexts from which they derive, and the dates of the cited Hawling Road parallels. (Numerals in the date column are centuries AD).

Table 2. Form parallels with Hawling Road, Market Weighton (HRMW)

<u>HRMW form</u>	<u>HES occurrences</u>	<u>HES contexts</u>	<u>HRMW context dates</u>
G01-J07	1	1582	IA
G25-J02/G32-J01	5	480, 767, 791, 1049, 2040	IA, 1 or 2, E2
G29-J04	1	442	IA
G29-J06	1	1002	1
G32-J02/G29-J04	3	2040, 2135, 3020	IA, Flavian

Other form types also tend to suggest a date on the cusp of the Iron Age and Romano-British periods, among which may be mentioned varieties of small bead-rim and wedge-rim globular jar comparable to Rigby 2004, fig. 7 (upper left). In Rigby’s schema for Iron Age pottery from the Yorkshire Wolds, these are attributed to “Typological Grouping h, 100BC - AD100”. These occur in Heslington contexts 928 and 1190.

The presence of a sub-group of highly burnished wares displaying a very high degree of potting skill has already been mentioned. These constitute a “truly remarkable” group of Late Iron Age vessels (T. G. Manby, pers. comm.) and are probably best considered as reflecting some of the improvements in kiln technology and developments in potting styles and techniques taking place in the later Iron Age in parts of southern England. Occasional fineware vessels reflecting these more southerly traditions are, if not common, at least not unusual in Late Iron Age assemblages in south-east Yorkshire, but they are probably usually the result of cross-Humber contact, most often consisting of cordoned vessels in the Aylesford-Swarling tradition of the kinds prevalent at Dragonby (May 1996). The Heslington vessels are rather different in that they tend to be highly burnished and skilfully potted versions of forms which would otherwise not seem remarkable in the local tradition. The two main forms which occur are: S-shaped jars, distinguished by their sinuous profile, and barrel jars of various types, including the lid-seated.

The first of these types is discussed by Challis and Harding (1975, 96), as being among the most common of their common La Tène III forms; varieties of barrel jar also occur widely at this period but are much longer lived, appearing throughout much of the first millennium BC (*op. cit.* 97-98).

The S-shaped jar is best represented at Heslington by a remarkable example from context 1193, the best parallels for which are Challis and Harding 1975, fig. 41, no. 3 (from Saltshouse School, Hull) and *op. cit.* fig 48, no. 8 (from Normanby). It may be noted that the Saltshouse School site is conventionally dated to the first century AD.

A third type, represented by a single vessel from 1002, appears to be a fineware version of the Hawling Road form G29-J06, a first-century AD form already noted above (Table 2).

Table 3 shows the distribution of these fineware vessels at Heslington.

Table 3. Distribution of fineware forms at Heslington

<u>Context</u>	<u>Provisional context date</u>	<u>Type</u>
400	3 or 4	S-shaped jar
783	?	S-shaped jars x 2
1002	L4	Hawling Road G29-J06
1002	L4	Barrel
1045	L4	Barrel
1109	?	Barrel
1193	L4	S-shaped jar
1151	L4	Barrel
1479	?	S-shaped jar
1758	L4	Barrel
2040	RB	Barrel

Conclusions and recommendations

The handmade pottery discussed above almost certainly belongs principally to the Later Iron Age. Both finewares and coarsewares consistently find their best published parallels at this period, more specifically to a very late horizon within it, perhaps the first centuries BC and AD. It would therefore seem that it was site activity of that period which contributed much of this class of material to the site assemblage. Some of it may be post Iron Age *sensu stricto*, and contemporary with some of the earliest wheel-thrown Roman wares from the site (e.g. the Rusticated Ware).

The assemblage, particularly the finewares, constitutes a body of material of the first regional, and possibly national, importance, one which should be brought to full publication at a later stage. Work towards such a publication would necessitate a much more detailed fabric characterization, with the comparative literature search necessary to do it discursive justice. There is scope for C¹⁴ determinations on the carbonized residues present on some of the pots.

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